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CLARENTE;

BY MISS BURNEY,

AUTHOR OF

TRAITS OF NATURE, GERALDINE FAUCONBERG, ETC.

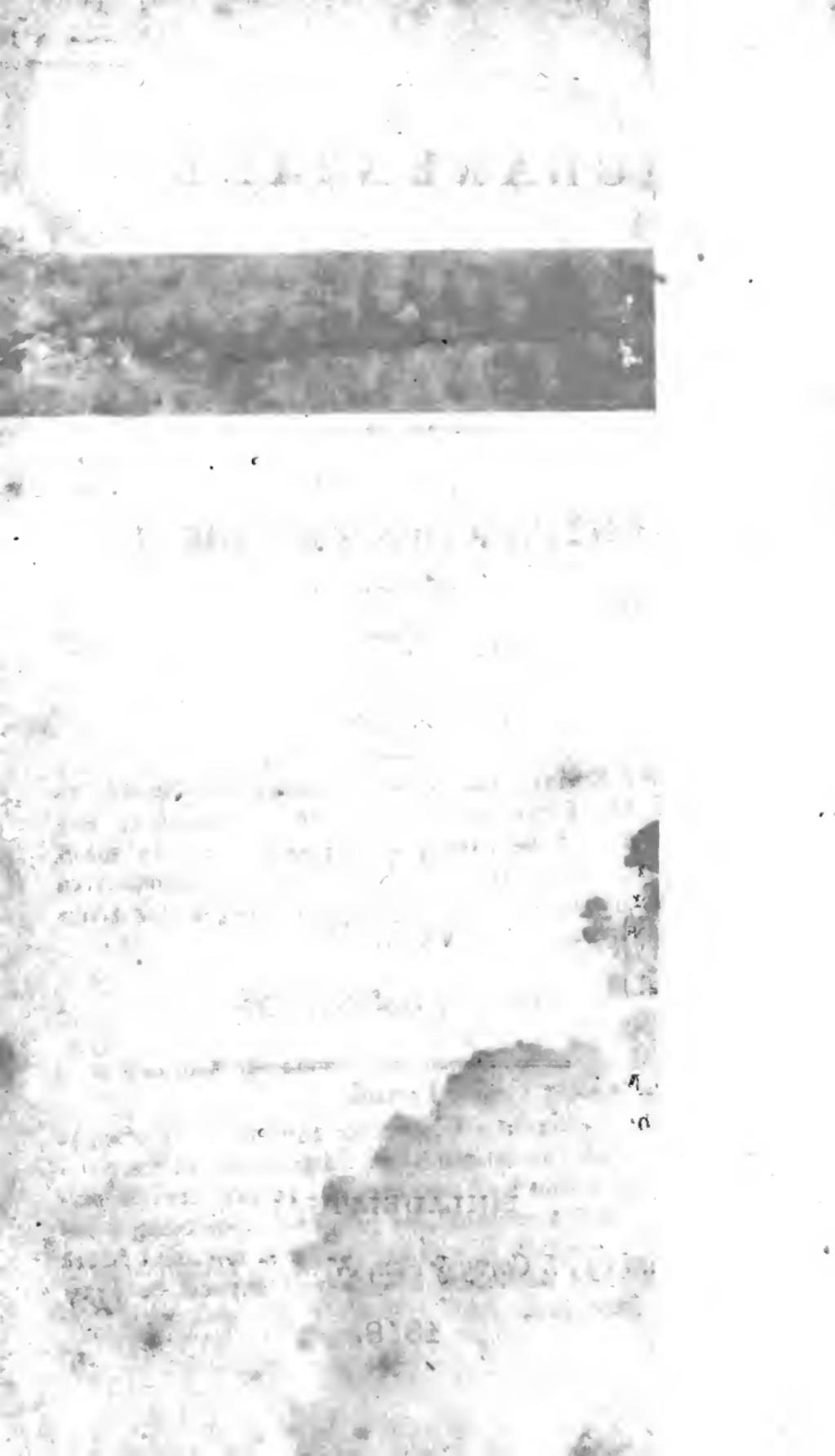
IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CLARENTINE.

CONTINUATION OF BOOK III.

CHAPTER VI.

THREE days had now elapsed since the departure of Mr. Lenham, and Clarentine, though in that time she had hourly gained ground in the good opinion of Mrs. Barclay, began most impatiently to long for his return, when the following letter from him was brought to her :

MISS DELMINGTON.

Somerset-Hall, July 26.

“ My dear young Friend,

“ The intelligence I have to announce to you, it was my wish to communicate in person, but the probable delays that will protract my return are so numerous, that I cannot any longer—possessing a secret which I think it will give your benevolent heart pleasure to be informed of—permit myself to keep you in ignorance.

“ Mr. Somerset’s will, you have already heard, has been inspected. It was drawn up, as is evident by the date, three years since, and excepting a few trifling legacies to servants, contains nothing that does not relate to his son. In a codicil, however, which was added to it so lately as within four days of his decease, is a declaration stating, that—“ In consideration of Clarentine Delmington’s near affinity to his late wife, the testator gives and bequeaths, to the said Clarentine Delmington, the sum of 5000*l.* the capital of which is to be made over to her without limit or restriction, on the day she comes of age ; and in the interval between that period and the present, to be consigned to the management and trust of the Rev. Francis Lenham ; whom, in conjunction with his son, William Somerset, he appoints her guardian and trustee. Moreover, that from the day of his decease, the annual interest of the same 5000*l.* amounting to 250*l.* shall be duly paid during her minority to the said Clarentine Delmington, out of his personal property in the five per cents.”

“ Now my excellent young friend, suffer me to congratulate you upon this just and equitable donation. To a mind disinterested and liberal as I was long since taught to believe yours, the value of such an acquisition, as it relates only to yourself, will be small, in comparison to that it must derive as relating to those it may enable you to serve ; since now, although not affluent, you are independent ; and with sufficient to supply all your own reasonable wishes, have something to spare towards the wants—the equally reasonable, and far more pressing, wants of others. How many there are who might envy you this power ! and how many more, I fear, who might envy the disposition which I doubt not will lead you thus to exercise it !

“ But permit me before I conclude, in justice to our absent friend, your guardian now, and always

your most zealous well-wisher, to acquaint you with an instance of his early affection which, perhaps, may not have come to your knowledge.

“ There was a period when he had reason to apprehend—and indeed, till lately, who had not?—you might at his father’s decease be less favourably remembered. Poor at that time himself, at least, comparatively so; extremely young, and totally dependent, he had no means of securing you any immediate provision: but his generous heart furnishing him with expedients for the future, although powerless at the moment, he formed the noble design of binding himself by the most irrevocable engagement, to ensure to you, on his coming into possession of his fortune, a fixed and certain competency. A promise to this effect I accordingly drew up for him, put into his hands to sign, and afterwards, at his own request, subscribed myself.

“ Upon the legality of such a deed, considered as the act of a minor, there was not, I acknowledge, much stress to be laid: upon the scrupulous conscientiousness, however, with which he meant to ratify it, the firmest dependence, I am persuaded, was to be placed; and therefore complying with the earnest solicitations of the youthful projector, I sent it to Sir James Delmington, enclosed in a letter which stated his motives for consigning it to his care, and the apprehensions that had urged him to draw it up.

“ What became of this paper I know not, or whether it was ever mentioned to you as being thought worthy of attention. At all events, it seemed incumbent upon me to revive the memory of a circumstance which does so much honour to the heart of Somerset—and which, without wounding your feelings, must so deservedly excite your gratitude and sensibility.

“ Farewell, my amiable young ward. I am impatient to return to you, yet, at present, totally unable

to decide when that will be. Should you, therefore, have any motive for wishing to write to me before the end of the ensuing week, direct to me here, and be assured of the punctuality and readiness with which I shall at all times be anxious to execute your commands.

“ I remain,

“ My dear Miss Delmington,
“ With the most affectionate regard,

“ Your obedient,

“ And devoted humble servant,

F. LENHAM.”

Clarentine had rapidly perused this letter three several times before she could persuade herself that what she read was real. Thus suddenly, thus unexpectedly to find herself in the absolute possession of a fortune which to her moderate and rational mind appeared so ample, seemed too like enchantment to be believed!—How was she ever to spend it? How create to herself new wants sufficient to render it of any use? The point was not easy to decide, since absurd as it would hitherto have appeared to her, for one instant to have indulged the improbable idea of ever becoming the uncontrouled mistress of such an income, she had not one favourite plan to advert to, or one long cherished scheme, however visionary it might before have seemed, which now she wished to realise.

“ This then being the case,” cried she, smiling at the perplexed, and even risible deliberation in which she had been engaged, “ I must disclaim all title to the admiration which is the usual reward of *generosity*, and learn to be content with the more humble commendation that follows *justice*. In disposing of my super-abundance towards the relief of those less bounteously provided for, I make no sacrifice, can boast no merit, and renounce no gratification. In

reality I want nothing, at least nothing which in my present circumstances a third part of the annual stipend I am to receive will not abundantly supply. Beyond that, all which I might dissipate would be unnecessary and almost criminal. I have no fashionable connexions; no expensive pursuits, no extravagant habits: in what then without torturing my brain to invent new modes of prodigality, in what *could* I (who have so long been inured to frugality and retirement) spend an income, which to me appears so boundless and inexhaustible?"

The result of these philosophical, but untutored reflections was, that, without communicating her purpose to any one, except Mr. Lenham, whom she thought it her duty upon all occasions to consult, she determined immediately to take upon herself the discharge of the full sum Lady Delmington now paid for her board and lodging; and then, dividing the residue of her whole year's allowance into two equal portions, to appropriate the one, at least during her present exigencies, to the use of Madame d'Arzele; and to retain the other, still more than sufficient to gratify every wish she could form, for her own expenditure.

Having decided upon a plan, which thus effectually relieved her from the troublesome *embarras des richesses* in which she had so sincerely dreaded to be involved, Clarentine, with a mind lightened of all its new cares, and a countenance more than usually animated and glowing, descended rather before the accustomed hour at which the family was wont to assemble to tea, and joined Mrs. Barclay and her daughter in the garden.

The vivacity that sparkled in her eyes, and the unrestrained gaiety with which she accosted them, excited Miss Barclay's immediate attention; and after staring in her face some time with great curiosity, she bluntly exclaimed—

“ Why, in the name of wonder, what’s come to you this evening? I never saw you look so lively and merry before. Have you had any good news?”

“ Yes,” replied Clarentine smiling—“ I have had very good news.”

“ I am glad to hear it,” cried Mrs. Barclay, “ I hope you will tell us what it is.”

To this, Clarentine not foreseeing the strange construction that might be put upon the uncommon cheerfulness she had betrayed, and naturally too open and undisguised to have any predilection for unnecessary mysteries and concealments, readily consented, and in as few words as possible, frankly recapitulated the contents of Mr. Lenham’s letter. When she had concluded—

“ Upon my word,” cried Miss Barclay drily—“ I don’t so much wonder at your sprightliness now! You have good substantial reasons for it; and yet, I don’t know how it is, but I should have been tempted to imagine a young lady like you, whose refinement and disinterestedness has been so much cried up, would have shewn less rapture upon such a *worldly occasion*! I am glad, however, to find there’s not that difference between us I thought there was; for to speak the truth, this is exactly the way I should have received such intelligence myself.”

“ Ay, to be sure;” cried her mother, intending to espouse Clarentine’s cause, “ You don’t suppose Miss Clary has not spirit enough to be pleased as much as other people at such a lucky *God-send*! For my part, I give her joy on’t with all my soul; and heartily wish she could do the same by me!”

A cordial burst of self-applause followed this witty speech; after which, Clarentine not choosing to enter upon her own vindication, very little more was said that related to the subject, and they all walked in to tea.

CHAPTER VII.

CLARENTINE, assured of being less unfavourably interpreted by her friends at Delmington than she had been by Mrs. and Miss Barclay, wrote the next morning, a detail of the unexpected communication she had received from Mr. Lenham, and enclosed an extract from his own letter, as a confirmation that seemed indispensably requisite of the wonderful and scarce credible tale she asserted.

To this letter, a very few days brought her an answer, abounding in congratulations the most affectionate and cordial, not only from every individual of the family, but from Lady Julia, and her excellent father also. As for the warm-hearted Sophia, she seemed quite wild with joy—"only," as she confessed herself—"the idea of Clarentine's being doomed to live with such people as the Barclays disturbed her beyond measure."

"I cannot bear your odious Miss Lucy," she added—"and can hardly persuade myself even to think with Christian charity of her mama. You speak very cautiously about them—yet I can plainly perceive they are the most contracted, narrow minded, vulgar animals that ever were created! How is it possible such a polished amiable man as Mr. Lenham, can endure such creatures in his house?—Quit them, for shame! and come and live with your charming Madame d'Arzele again. Indeed, indeed these people are not fit society for my Clarentine.

"As for Mr. Eltham, who you tell me has already introduced himself at your house, I suspect he will have some very entertaining dialogues with Miss Lucy! She promises fair to become an admirable butt for him. Pray send me a minute account of his behaviour to her; do all you can to persuade her to fall in love with him; and then, if you desire effec-

tually to get rid of him, betray her to mama, and counsel the good lady to prohibit his visits ! You will laugh at this advice perhaps, but I can assure you, I should follow it myself very exactly, in the same circumstances.

“ But *apropos*—I scarcely know *de quoi* though, but that is no matter ; let me inform you of that dear, delightful Lord Welwyn’s enchanting plan for his daughter next spring. He means to take her to town for three months, in order to have her presented, and likewise in order to inure her a little to the bustle and confusion of the great world, previous to *her marriage*. During the first month or six weeks of their residence in London, Harriet, *en droit d’ainesse*, is invited to be with them ; after which *my* turn is to arrive, and I am to join their party till their return to this place in May. Lady Julia’s pretty mouth dimples at this prospect, when talking of it with me ; but at other times, if she sits and thinks of it alone, her timid heart sinks with terror at the idea of a scene so new, an introduction so formidable, and a manner of living so busy and so perturbed. Not so your enraptured Sophia. Having no presentations to fear (thanks to my obscurity, and thanks also to the *rural* style of life I seem destined to lead) all I look forward to is amusement, and all I anticipate is pleasure. *Here*, these are things I never panted to obtain, because I very well knew they were not to *be* obtained ; but *there*, as both are accessible, I am fully determined both shall be enjoyed ! And so, farewell my beloved Clarentine farewell till next April.”

Thus concluded this gay and characteristic letter. It put Clarentine into spirits for the day, and inspired her with so much joy on account of the happy prospect it held out for the spring, that her delight upon the occasion was scarcely inferior to that of Sophia herself.

After an absence of near three weeks, Mr. Len-

ham at length returned. Clarentine welcomed him on his arrival with the truest satisfaction ; and impatient to make known to him, and to obtain his sanction of her projected designs, seized the first opportunity, when they were by themselves, of speaking to him upon the subject.

To her intended donation annually to Madame d'Arzele, the nearness and dearness of that lady's relationship to her, and the distressed state of her actual circumstances, forbade his making any opposition ; on the contrary, he applauded her purpose with warmth, and assured her he entertained not the least doubt of its meeting with the readiest concurrence from Captain Somerset.

With regard, however, to her payment of himself, during her residence at his house, he declined saying any thing, leaving her to settle the matter in whatever way she chose with Lady Delmington herself.

Thus authorised, Clarentine lost no time in farther consideration, but arming herself with courage for the arduous undertaking, immediately retired to her own room for the purpose of writing to Madame d'Arzele.

Her letter, though short, was at once persuasive, earnest, and affectionate ; every motive she could urge in favour of her proposal was strongly dwelt upon, and forcibly pointed out. Eloquent, yet timid ; animated, yet respectful, by turns she reasoned, and she sued, till argument itself was exhausted, and supplication could reach no further.

Enclosed in this letter, was a bill for 25*l.* deducted from the first quarterly payment she had received from Mr. Lenham ; an equal sum remained for her own use ; and the rest she determined to lay apart towards the discharge of the yearly pension Lady Delmington had agreed to pay for her.

Her next business was, to inform that lady herself of her decision. This, though by no means so diffi-

cult a task as the former, was one, however, that still required the utmost delicacy and circumspection. Proudly, or ungraciously, after all the obligations she had received, to have rejected any further services the instant her dependence was at an end, would have evinced a degree of selfishness and ingratitude, of which Clarentine could not bear to be thought capable. Her letter, therefore, though plain and candid, was more humble and more diffident than any she had ever written before.

By return of post she received the two answers she so ardently desired.

The first she opened, that of Madame d'Arzele, affected her so deeply before she had proceeded half through it, that she had scarce power to read to its conclusion. The impassioned gratitude and sensibility it expressed ; the kind and flattering acceptation it contained ; and above all, the tender acknowledgments with which it abounded on behalf of the helpless babes, to whom such a grant afforded certain maintenance and support, delighted at once, and distressed the feeling Clarentine almost to an equal degree ! More than ever, however, did she congratulate herself upon the dispensation she had made, and more than ever prize the power she had acquired.

Lady Delmington wrote with less enthusiasm, it will be believed, but scarcely with less affection. She agreed to her niece's proposal as to a thing it would be indelicate to oppose ; yet at the same time rallied her with a considerable degree of archness upon the promptitude with which she had thought it necessary to announce her determination, and good humouredly cautioned her against adding one more, to the too-ample list that already existed of *proud Delmingtons*.

Clarentine, though she could scarcely help laughing, was yet sorry to have appeared, even in jest, to require such a warning. She flattered herself, however, that when she wrote again she should be able

to prove how little it was necessary ; and meanwhile, discarding from her mind all reflections that could excite uneasiness, gave herself up without reserve to the pleasure that resulted from the consciousness of having benefited those she loved, and performed her own part with rectitude.

CHAPTER VIII.

SIX weeks had now nearly elapsed since Clarentine's arrival at Hampstead, and except Eltham, who, in that time had repeatedly called, and Mrs. Denbigh, who, since the return of Mr. Lenham, often drank tea at the house, she had scarcely seen one individual who did not immediately belong to the family, or ventured beyond the limits of the garden, or the small field that adjoined to it.

One evening, however, being left, at the end of that period, *tête-a-tête*, with Miss Barclay, whose mother was gone to London upon business with Mr. Lenham, she consented at that young lady's pressing solicitation to accompany her on a more distant ramble.

The evening was so fine, and, when it contained no company, Miss Barclay's aversion to the house was so great, that night was coming on rapidly before Clarentine could persuade her to turn back ; and consequently when they arrived at their own door it was already completely dark.

Rejoiced, however, to have reached home at all, Clarentine, after she entered, staid not to reproach her adventurous companion for her imprudence, but quitting her at the bottom of the stairs, turned short into the parlour to look whether any letters had been brought for her during her absence.

As she opened the door, and was hastily advancing without any other light than that which a glimmering

fire afforded, the tall figure of a man standing up immediately opposite to her, with his back to the chimney, startled her so much, that she was half tempted to run out again. Hearing one of the maids, however, in the passage, she called to her, and with as little appearance of alarm as she could, said in a low voice—

“ Is this gentleman waiting for your master ? ”

“ Yes, Miss—he came in just before you.”

Somewhat re-assured on finding he had gained *legal admission*, she then ordered candles, intending the moment they were brought to quit the room, and rejoin Miss Barclay.

Meanwhile, the stranger, (who in height and figure bore so peculiar a resemblance to Eltham, that she was sometimes half tempted to think it was Eltham in person) had resigned his station at the fire, and very politely placed a chair for her near it, concluding she meant as well as himself to wait there till Mr. Lenham returned.

Clarentine, too much embarrassed by the awkwardness of her situation to attempt speaking, only bowed her thanks, without venturing to move from the door, which she held half open in her hand, ready to make her escape the moment the maid re-appeared.

A silence so determined, and still more, the cautious distance at which she stood, seemed to excite the stranger’s curiosity, for, before the candles could arrive, growing impatient to see her face, he once again approached the fire, and gave it so effectual a stir, that the bright flame into which it burst out enabled him instantly to take a perfect view of her whole countenance, at the same time that it likewise afforded her an opportunity of examining him.

The total silence that had preceded this mutual survey was now but of short duration. Clarentine, agitated, and almost breathless, broke it first; and irresolutely advancing, said in an eager and tremu-

lous accent, whilst her eyes were intently riveted on his face—

“ Do I deceive myself? Can this be real? Are you *indeed* Capt. Somerset?”

Somerset (for it was he himself) allowed her time to say no more. Struck by the earnest tone of her voice, and the touching sensibility that was evident in her countenance, his warm and affectionate heart sprung forth to meet her, and told him, at once, she could be no other than the dear, the pitied, and ever lovely orphan, whom he had parted from almost a child, and now beheld, in stature and in form, a finished, graceful woman.

“ My Clarentine!” cried he, flying towards her, and taking her hand, “ my dearest Clarentine! How little was I prepared for the pleasure of meeting you here! Do you live with Mr. Lenham? Have you been long in town? Tell me, tell me every thing that relates to yourself, and every thing which you may reasonably suppose, a wanderer such as I have been, must wish to know and feel interested in hearing!”

“ I will,” cried Clarentine, smiling at his eagerness, “ I will most readily: but at least sit down to hear my tale; for since you ask so much at once, you cannot expect me to be very brief.”

The entrance of the maid prevented her saying any more, and checked for a time the enquiries which Somerset was so anxious to pour forth. His eyes, however, during that interval spoke most expressively, and as he again delightedly regarded her with looks of admiration and surprise, plainly indicated all the pleasure he felt, and all the friendship he retained.

When once more they were left by themselves, hesitating a moment, and half-smiling, he said, “ The longer I see you, the less I know how to renounce my ancient privileges; and yet, I ought not now to address you thus familiarly, to call you, as in former times, *my Clarentine*, and to treat you with this uncourtly plainness. Can you, in consideration of what

I am, a blunt, unpolished sailor, can you pardon so glaring a solecism in good manners?"

"Would I could as easily pardon," replied Clarentine, a little reproachfully, "your long silence, and your breach of promise!"

Somerset's gaiety vanished in a moment—

"Is this," cried he, earnestly, "a just reproach? No, believe me—frequently and constantly did I write, not only during my late West-India station, but also while yet cruising in the Mediterranean; to some of the earliest of these letters I even received answers, but to all those of later date you have invariably remained silent."

Clarentine at the conclusion of this speech looked a little conscious, and appeared at a loss what defence to make for herself. The fact was, that not having received, since he quitted the Mediterranean, any one of the letters he had written, she had grown weary of keeping up so languid a correspondence, and had wholly discontinued writing herself. This, after some hesitation, she honestly confessed; and peace being then restored, Somerset earnestly besought her to gratify the anxious curiosity he had to know what cause had determined her to quit her former residence.

Though infinitely averse to entering fully upon this subject, and fearful of drawing upon herself the imputation of vanity and conceit, Clarentine so far conquered her reluctance, however, as to speak of it, after the first moment, with all that candour and openness which Somerset's long friendship for her, his near relationship, and the interest he took in her affairs, entitled him, she thought, to expect. Throwing off all disguise, therefore, she frankly acknowledged that to Sir Edgar's imprudent attachment was alone to be attributed her late removal, and her present situation.

This confession naturally led to the mention of Lady Julia, whose engagement she spoke of with the

same sincerity, as well as of the obligation she had thought herself under, on account of the confidence and kindness with which her Ladyship had always honoured her, to repress any hopes Sir Edgar might have conceived with regard to herself.

“Of perfidy towards a friend for whom I entertained so much affection, and who in herself was so amiable, I may venture to affirm,” continued Clarentine, “I should have been utterly incapable, even had my love for Sir Edgar been of a nature less sisterly than it was. Not for one moment, therefore, did I harbour the detestable idea—form the slightest wish of supplanting her; neither should I have been weak enough, if I *had*, to imagine such an attempt could ever have been sanctioned by his mother. Destined consequently, if I remained in the same house, to become an object of continual suspicion—to shun Sir Edgar assiduously—to dissemble with Lady Julia, and in return perhaps to excite only distrust, I now begin to think, however I might lament it at first, that the temporary banishment to which I have been consigned, was the happiest thing that could have befallen me. Sir Edgar also, I am now persuaded, thinks so himself. He has implicitly submitted to the wishes of his family, and ratified every promise that had been made for him.”

“Ten thousand thanks, my charming friend,” cried Somerset, when she paused, “ten thousand thanks for this ingenuous recital. The noble sincerity that so early distinguished you—that so early excited the esteem and confidence of all who knew you, time, I perceive, has had no power to diminish. You are still the same open, unreserved, and generous Clarentine I ever found you!”

“I suspect by the warmth of this eulogium,” replied Clarentine, smiling, “you impute greater merit to me upon the present occasion than I really deserve. Had my *heart* been as much a sufferer in this busi-

ness as my *pride*, my frankness to you might indeed have claimed some admiration ; but that not being the case, I had nothing more to overcome than a momentary sensation of embarrassment, the natural consequence of being the heroine ; and what is worse, the *heroine in disgrace*—of my own tale. Let us now, however," added she, " talk of something else. How long have you been in England ?"

"A very short time," answered Somerset.

He then proceeded to inform her of the dreadful shock he had received, on his arrival in Northamptonshire, whither he hastened the instant he landed, in total ignorance of the melancholy event that had recently taken place. Unprepared as he was for such intelligence—dispirited and completely overpowered by it, he had for some days no courage to think of writing, or even to attempt moving from the gloomy and uninhabited mansion to which, with such far different hopes, he had so eagerly repaired.

Becoming impatient, however, to learn some tidings of his friends in London, but more particularly of the revered and venerable Mr. Lenham, he had made an effort at length to shake off the listlessness and depression that had hitherto retained him in inactivity, and determined to set out and make those inquiries in person. In London he had seen only the old domestic who still resided in his father's house ; and from him obtaining no satisfactory information, had proceeded forward almost without stopping till he reached Hampstead.

This little narrative was scarcely concluded, before Mr. Lenham returned.

Clarentine witnessed the first meeting of that excellent man and his youthful friend, with the most sympathising emotions of delight and joy. They remained, however, but a short time below, as the presence of Mrs. and Miss Barclay, who soon after entered the room, seemed to repress the mutual over-

flowings of their hearts, and utterly to prevent their engaging in any confidential discourse.

When therefore they had retired to Mr. Lenham's study, and Clarentine was left with the two ladies, Miss Barclay, with an eagerness it was by no means easy to account for, asked how long Somerset had been arrived? where he intended to reside? what stay it was probable he would make in England? and so many other questions of the same nature, that Clarentine, unprepared for such an examination, at length attempted to check it, by saying—

“ I am not yet acquainted with half these particulars, my dear Miss Barclay, and therefore cannot possibly reply to them; but tell me, whence this extreme solicitude concerning Captain Somerset? did you ever see him before? ”

“ Yes, very often—and yet, it is not for myself I ask all this. I was desired by—”

She stopped, and colouring violently, presently added—“ In short, I have reasons for wishing to know as much as I can about him. If you don't choose, however, to give me any information, I shall endeavour to find out those that will.”

“ Why, what is all this fuss and secrecy about? ” enquired her mother, a little angrily—“ I should be glad to know, Lucy, what Capt. Somerset can be to you! ”

“ Lord, mama! ” exclaimed Miss Lucy peevishly, “ how should you understand any thing about the matter! —I suppose I may ask a common question or two without being called to account for it like a child! ”

And so saying, she indignantly flung out of the room, throwing the door after her with such violence, that she made every window in the house rattle in its frame.

“ Lord help us, what a girl it is! ” cried her mother, as soon as she was gone—“ there's no speaking a word to her without putting her in a pet! I dare

say, however, I have guessed pretty nearly what it is, Miss Clary, that makes her so curious about your cousin. She's a fool for her pains, and had much better be minding her own affairs, than trying to play other people's cards for them."

Clarentine was totally unable to comprehend this hint, and but little inclined to seek its explanation. She therefore suffered it to pass without any comment, and Mrs. Barclay, the next minute, began talking of other things.

At supper the two gentlemen made their appearance again, and Miss Barclay hearing them go down, smoothed her frowning brow, and tripped lightly after them. She seated herself opposite Somerset, and devoted her whole attention to him; frequently fixing her large dark eyes upon his face with an earnestness and perseverance, that no less astonished Clarentine, than it evidently offended Mr. Lenham. As for Somerset himself, it was some time before he observed her: but when he did, regarding her in return with nearly equal curiosity, he suddenly addressed her as a person he had that moment recollected, and said—

"I think I have had the honour of seeing you somewhere else, Madam. Were you not with Miss Compton at Mrs. Castleton's near Portsmouth, just before my last embarkation but one?"

Miss Barclay answered in the affirmative, adding, "Miss Compton is Mrs. Hertford now. She married soon after you sailed."

"I hope," resumed Somerset, "she is well."

"I have not seen her very lately,"—replied Miss Barclay,—"But as I understand she is now in town for a short time, I hope to have that pleasure to-morrow."

Somerset's enquiries, after this, proceeded no further: but Miss Barclay evidently wishing to dwell upon the subject, entered into a minute detail of every thing that had befallen her friend since her marriage;

and concluded by lamenting, in very strong terms, the unfortunate dependence and pecuniary embarrassments to which so lovely and accomplished a woman found herself reduced.

Somerset appeared to concur in this opinion very sincerely. He immediately wrote down Mrs. Hertford's direction, and declared his intention of calling upon her the next morning.

This little dialogue, though it seemed not to strike any one else, surprised Clarentine extremely. In Mrs. Hertford she appeared fated to discover, accidentally and by degrees, a woman, who though nearly a stranger to herself, was intimately known to every acquaintance or friend she had, and by each of them individually seemed to be held in a different degree of estimation. Eltham, she had found, thought of her with contempt, and spoke of her with derision; Miss Barclay never mentioned her but with the most unbounded praise and admiration; Mr. Lenham appeared not to doubt the respectability of her character, but, at the same time, to know too little of her to regard her with any thing but indifference; Mrs. Barclay had already betrayed that she considered her as a coquette; and lastly, Somerset, uninfluenced by the partiality of the one, or the prejudices of the other, openly professed to feel for her the utmost compassion, and to look upon her with the truest esteem. How were all these various opinions to be reconciled? Clarentine was lost in doubt and perplexity. Less inclined, however, to distrust the favourable sentiments of Somerset, than to suspect the judgment of Eltham, she once again, more strongly than ever, was confirmed in the belief that he had injured Mrs. Hertford, and causelessly led her to imbibe an erroneous idea of her.

Well acquainted with the early hours Mr. Lenham was accustomed to keep, his considerate guest took leave soon after they rose from table, promising

to repeat his visit some time in the course of the following day.

Accordingly, the next evening, just as Clarentine, who, though she knew not why, had been called down to tea sooner than usual, was preparing to obey the summons, she saw him, from her closet window, open the gate before the house, and walk up to the door. They met at the foot of the stairs, Somerset on hearing her call to him having waited there till she ran down; and after a short conversation entered the parlour together.—In addition to the usual family party, they found, seated next Mr. Lenham at the tea table, his friend Mrs. Denbigh. Captain Somerset knew that lady well, and immediately hastened forward to pay his respects to her; whilst Clarentine, incapable of attending to any thing else, stood for some minutes petrified with amazement, considering the altered dress, and strange decorations of Mrs. and Miss Barclay, who both, it was evident, were thus attired for foreign conquest, and perhaps also for domestic admiration.

As soon as tea was over, and the two ladies did every thing in their power to hurry it as much as possible, Miss Barclay started up, and casting her eyes towards the antique clock, which, from the chimney-piece on which it stood, had with undeviating regularity monotonously chimed each revolving hour for more than thirty years, eagerly called out to her mother—

“Lord mama, we shall be monstrous late; pray get your cloak and let’s be off.”

Young Blandford upon this addressed himself to Mrs. Barclay, and said—

“Shall I be allowed to go with you ma’am?”

“I don’t know, indeed, child; you hav’n’t got leave, have you?”

“O yes,” said Mr. Lenham smiling, “if you choose to be troubled with him, he has my full permission.”

" Well then, good-by to you all," cried Mrs. Barclay, " good by. Come along, Lucy, come."

" O, but stop, mama," said Miss Lucy, " stop a minute ; I forgot it till now ; but Mr. Eltham," added she, " overtook me in Pall Mall, just as I was stepping up to Mrs. Hertford's door, and gave me a thousand messages to deliver to Miss Delmington ; they are half gone out of my head, but I remember, however, they were all excessive civil, and (audibly whispering, with affected mysteriousness) excessive tender ! There, now, I have executed my commission —I'm ready.—Come Blandford."

Then followed by her mother, in as high spirits as herself, away tripped this exact and punctilious lady.

Somerset, extremely amused by their eagerness, now asked whither in such haste they were gone ?

Mrs. Denbigh, with a shrug and an emphatical groan, answered—

" To Breslaw's the *Conjurer*!"

Clarentine stared ; Somerset laughed ; and Mr. Lenham mildly said—

" Nay, my dear madam, why should we despise these good people for seeking to divert themselves their own way ? If their minds are incapacitated for higher enjoyments, in God's name, let them go to the *Conjurer's*."

" Why, truly," resumed Mrs. Denbigh, leisurely tapping the lid of her snuff-box, " if by some lucky slight of hand the cunning man could succeed in twirling their brains round to the proper place, I should think their time could not be better spent : but with all his ingenuity, I never heard friend Breslaw possessed the requisite abilities for such a task."

" Who knows," thought Somerset, " what friend Breslaw might achieve if the brains were there to twirl !"

Then addressing Clarentine—

" How comes it," said he, smiling, " you were not of this party ?"

"I never heard it had been planned," answered she, "till it would have been too late to have proposed joining it."

"O, Miss Delmington, I understand," said Mrs. Denbigh, "is deemed utterly unworthy of being made a partaker of these refined amusements! Mrs. Barclay was not even permitted to mention her intention before her."

At that moment a loud ring at the gate-bell was heard; and whilst Mr. Lenham was endeavouring to conjecture who this unexpected visitor might be, the maid entered, and particularly addressing the intelligence to Clarentine, announced Mr. Eltham.

Somerset, instantly recollecting the parting speech Miss Barclay had uttered, turned his eyes towards Clarentine with an arch smile, and was beginning to rally her upon this visit, when observing her change colour, and look extremely disconcerted, he checked himself in some consternation, and directed all his attention towards the door, at which Eltham, the next minute, made his appearance.

Bowing first to Clarentine, as to the person whom his visit was principally designed for, and then in a more general way, to the rest of the party, he drew a chair near her's, and was upon the point of seating himself, when Mr. Lenham, who had at first forgot that ceremony, but now recollecting that as they might often meet it would be necessary, begged leave to introduce him and Capt. Somerset to each other.

Eltham, starting at the name, and looking towards Somerset, who at the same moment bowed to him with the most eager curiosity, made a grave inclination to him in return, and taking his place in total silence, assumed an air of extreme reserve, and spoke not for a considerable time, unless called upon by some direct enquiry.

The first quarter of an hour was devoted, as is invariably the case among people who know but little of each other's habits and connexions, to animadver-

ing upon the heat or cold of the weather ; the fulness or emptiness of the town ; the dustiness of the roads, and other such enlivening topics ! By degrees, however, the conversation took a more agreeable turn : Somerset, who at first had been too much offended by the cold haughtiness of Eltham's manners to bear any part in it, animated by the example of Mr. Lenham and Mrs. Denbigh, made an effort to conquer his ill-humour ; and Eltham reviving likewise, and every where equally at his ease, and equally unembarrassed, soon engaged them all three, either in earnest support, or opposition, of the wild opinions he advanced, and, at least, if he could not *convince, entertained* ; if he could not *overpower, perplex* them.

Clarentine during this conversation sat at work, and wholly silent ; but by no means inattentive. She was amused by the fire and eccentricity of Eltham ; charmed by the candour and patience of Mr. Lenham ; surprised at the information and knowledge of Mrs. Denbigh ; and interested by the modesty, the good sense, and unassuming gentleness of Somerset. In him, though she observed not the same boldness in maintaining extravagant systems, or the same readiness to *assert*, and eagerness to *defend* preposterous chimeras that she discovered in Eltham, she perceived a clearness of judgment, and a consistency of principle, that weighed far more with her than all the false glare of his antagonist, the brilliancy of his wit, or the ingenuity of his arguments.

This spirited, but amicable contention, lasted till the return of Mrs. and Miss Barclay, and their young companion. Eltham would then have taken his leave, but Mr. Lenham, naturally hospitable and polite, pressed him to stay supper ; and to this without much importunity, he consented.

Meanwhile young Blandford, having seated himself next Clarentine, was giving her, at her own request, a circumstantial detail of all the wonders to

which he had been a witness. The subject soon drew the attention of Mrs. Barclay herself, who as much a child to the full as the juvenile narrator, hung over the back of his chair, assisted him in the recital whenever his memory failed, and appeared to enjoy nearly as much delight in *repeating* what she had seen, as she could have done had the whole been acted again before her.

Their eagerness and volubility at length excited the curiosity of Somerset and Eltham, who now became auditors in their turn, affected to listen with the utmost astonishment to the many surprising feats of dexterity that were recounted; and so enchanted the two relators by their earnest attention, that had not a timely summons to the supper-table interrupted the flow of their eloquence, Clarentine, must have despaired of release till the whole party broke up for the night.

The conversation during their meal, though it was more diffuse and unconnected than it had been in the early part of the evening, was supported with good-sense by *some*, with good-humour by *all* present; and when the hour of separation drew near, every body appeared to think of it with reluctance.

At the moment of taking leave, Eltham perceiving that Clarentine stood at some distance from the rest of the company, took advantage of the general confusion to approach, and address her in a low voice—

“ I begin to like your Somerset,” said he, “ better than I expected. He is *rational* without being *dull*; and the first in whom I ever found united the plain frankness of a sailor, with the good-breeding and the polish of a man of fashion ! ”

“ I am glad to find you so well disposed to do him justice,” said Clarentine.

“ Ah, but remember,” resumed Eltham with quickness,—“ remember upon what *terms* I do him this justice; no longer than whilst he inviolably adheres to his present character of *guardian*, and of *friend* ! ”

"Then long, I believe," said Clarentine, smiling, "long indeed may he flatter himself he shall retain your favour!"

"Are you sincere?" cried Eltham, stedfastly regarding her, "are you really sincere in this opinion? You blush!" continued he, after a short silence. "Oh Clarentine! you spoke not as your wishes, or your heart directed!"

Clarentine affecting to laugh, yet cruelly confused, turned away without answering him, and walked up to Mr. Lenham; whilst Eltham, rooted for some minutes to the spot where she had left him, followed her reproachfully with his eyes; and then, hardly conscious of what he did, put on his hat, and ran abruptly out of the room. Somerset soon after followed him, and Clarentine the next moment retired.

CHAPTER IX.

SOMERSET, unwilling to remove to any distance from Hampstead, had now established himself at his house in Clifford street, for the winter, and scarcely suffered a day to pass in the course of which he did not, either morning or evening, visit his young ward. Attentive to the minutest circumstance that could conduce to her domestic comfort and convenience, and well knowing that her *own* would be the last wants she would allow herself to supply, he took the utmost delight in ornamenting and fitting up for her the favourite closet he had heard her so partially commemorate. Books, drawings, an excellent harp, purchased in consequence of having accidentally learnt from Eltham that she used to perform upon that instrument; in short, whatever

fancy could devise, or wealth procure to make this little retreat worthy of the lovely possessor, was profusely lavished upon it; and by Clarentine, sensible of the generous pleasure he took in thus seeking to promote her satisfaction, gratefully, yet sometimes half reproachfully, accepted.

If she walked out, he accompanied her; whilst she sat working or drawing, he read to her; whatever she expressed the slightest wish to learn, he sought the best instructors to teach her;—and all this with such unpresuming delicacy, such a constant dread of disgusting her by too great an appearance of officiousness, that his assiduities, far from oppressing, or laying her under the smallest restraint, seemed but to wear the form of an affectionate brother's kindness, and never lessened, or for one moment checked that gay and innocent familiarity with which she had always been accustomed to treat him. He was her counsellor, guardian, protector, and friend all in one; she loved him with the most artless tenderness; advised with and confided in him implicitly upon all occasions; received every fresh mark of his attention with mingled pride and pleasure, as an additional proof of his approbation and good opinion; delighted in his society, and never felt so thoroughly elated as when she could flatter herself with the hope of having, by her cheerfulness, and zealous endeavours to oblige him, contributed, in some measure, to *his* happiness from whom she derived so large a portion of her own.

From a state of felicity thus pure, and thus serene, she was first disturbed by the importunate attentions of Eltham, and the yet more, to her, irksome and depressing visits of Mrs. Hertford. This lady of late renewing more closely than ever her former intimacy with Miss Barclay, and renewing likewise all her former inexplicable civility to Clarentine, had established herself, for the remainder of the Autumn,

in lodgings within a few doors of Mr. Lenham's, and might almost be said to spend her whole time at his house. She was accomplished, animated, and attractive ; by the major part of the family, therefore, her society was considered as a most valuable acquisition ; and by every guest who met her there, she was flattered and admired. Yet Clarentine, who, mild and placid as she was, supported with patient forbearance the pert familiarity of Miss Barclay, or the abrupt vulgarity of her mother ; Clarentine, of whom it might so justly have hitherto been said, that—

“ Her smiles were sober, and her looks
“ Were cheerful unto all,”*

in defiance of her wonted candour and sweetness, knew not how to endure this universal favourite. Vain had been every internal argument she had hitherto held in her behalf ; vain all her attempts to banish from her memory the first disadvantageous impression she had received of her ! The more she saw her, the more reserved and distant she found herself involuntarily becoming ; and to so painful a degree did these sensations of dislike at length arise, that as often as she could, when Mrs. Hertford called, she formed some excuse for quitting the room, and retreating to her own till she was gone.

Somerset, unsuspecting of the motive that gave birth to this singularity of conduct, gazed after her on these occasions with looks of equal mortification and concern. Often, though without success, did he attempt as she approached the door to lead her back, or at least, to extract from her a promise that she would soon return. However gentle her refusals, they were always steady and firm ; she could give no reason for her inflexibility, but if urged too long, her eyes involuntarily filled with tears, she looked dis-

* Reliques of Ancient Poetry.

tressed and embarrassed ; and the generous Somerset, too considerate to press her further, in silent wonder suffered her to depart.

From her earliest infancy, Clarentine recollects to have heard it said, and by one whom she respected and believed, the honoured Lady Delmington, that the most certain cure for the dejection of a mind ill at ease, was activity and employment. Clarentine's mind, and she too well suspected the cause, was ill at ease, more so than she ever remembered to have known it before. To employment, therefore, the most diligent and incessant, she had eager recourse ; and though her own wishes would have prompted her to indulge in listlessness, and even indolence, to her own wishes she permitted not herself to attend ; but spurred on by the hope of driving from her mind the sadness that oppressed it, every hour was devoted to the pursuit of some useful occupation, or to the accomplishment of some benevolent design. In company with Mrs. Denbigh, who upon a longer acquaintance she found as much reason to esteem as to admire, she visited and relieved many of the sick poor in the neighbourhood ; recommended their children to the notice and protection of Mr. Lenham ; found work for some of the young women who were willing to be employed ; and dispensed with so liberal a hand around her every blessing which kindness, sympathy, and timely, though not profuse donations, can confer, that however anxious and disquieted she might at intervals still feel, all real sorrow was nearly forgotten, and in contemplating the few, but grateful happy she had made, she was sometimes more than half inclined to include *herself* in the number.

CHAPTER X.

HITHERTO Clarentine, though she had now been at Mr. Lenham's near four months, had rarely been in London, and, except to Mrs. Denbigh, had never paid any visits whatever. She knew not a single individual in town ; and Somerset had always so earnestly cautioned her not to accompany the Bar-clays to any of the inferior public-places to which they were perpetually resorting, that she had resolutely declined ever being of their parties.

One morning, however, towards the latter end of November, hearing that the two ladies were going to town upon what they called *shopping business*, and meant positively to return to dinner ; wishing to seize that opportunity of making some purchases for herself, she proposed, if it was not inconvenient, going with them.

Somerset, who was present when this plan was agreed upon, very strenuously sought to obtain permission to attend her ; but this, Clarentine as strenuously opposed. Her prepossession against Mrs. Hertford had for some time past begun to give way to a slight degree of resentment against Somerset himself. She feared to whisper it even to her own heart, and yet she could not but feel, that the attention he paid that lady ; the pleasure he appeared to take in her conversation ; and the flattering admiration he avowed for her, had excited in her breast at some moments an emotion so nearly bordering upon envy, and so closely allied to jealousy and anger, that there could be but one passion, to which such sensations were to be attributed—and that passion was love ! Long had she most clearly discerned what were the designs of Mrs. Hertford herself ; and long had she beheld with astonishment her artful and persevering endeavours to captivate and attach him.

Floating between hope and fear ; conscious that her own heart was gone, and doubtful what would be the result of her rival's schemes, it had, however, been but of late that she had seriously apprehended they would be successful ; every hour now confirmed her in this opinion—increased the evident triumph of Mrs. Hertford, who seemed perfectly to have penetrated her secret sentiments, and ascertained the defeat of Somerset.

Had the woman, however, whom he had thus selected, afflicting to Clarentine as it must ever have been to know he had selected any, possessed a character more conformable to his own, and appeared to her more deserving and more worthy, she flattered herself, and not unjustly, that she could have submitted to her disappointment with greater fortitude. The first wish of her heart was to see him happy : but happy she was too well persuaded a man like him —whose disposition was all kindness and affection, and whose attachments were all domestic—could never be with a woman who, like Mrs. Hertford, betrayed unconsciously a nature so devoid of sensibility, a heart so selfish, and a mind so devoted to dissipation.

Sometimes, when silently observing them as they walked or conversed together, Clarentine had fancied this idea seemed to strike Somerset likewise. Her blandishments and her flattery appeared to fatigue him ; the coldest gravity often overspread his countenance ; and glad of any relief, yet scarce knowing what he did, he had eagerly seized on the most frivolous pretences to escape from her, and with studied procrastination delayed rejoining her again.

On these occasions, had she permitted it, Clarentine perceived he would gladly have taken refuge with her. She avoided him, however, most assiduously ; or if at any time accident threw her in his way when there was no third person present, behaved

to him with a reserve and formality, so unlike her former confidential gaiety, that although he formed not the most distant conjecture of its cause, he found himself involuntarily repulsed by her coldness, and obliged to desist from all further importunity.

Upon the present occurrence, this newly-assumed solemnity had shown itself with more than usual force, and Clarentine's rejection of him, uttered before Mrs. Hertford, had been accompanied by a look of impatience, and a smile of disdain, that confounded no less than it amazed him. He gazed at her for some minutes, as if he doubted the evidence of his own senses, and then after a long pause, attempting to take her hand, said—

"Miss Delmington, I entreat, I conjure you, though you have denied my first request, at least grant me five minutes conversation before you go!"

"I cannot, indeed," replied she—"Mrs. Barclay, I believe, is ready, and it is time we should set out."

Then turning to Mrs. Hertford, in whose eyes she beheld a gleam of malicious joy, that made her shudder, she slightly curtsied to her, and leaving them together, hastened away.

The moment she found herself at liberty, her full heart bursting with contending passions, she gave way to an agony of tears, and rushed into the first room that was open, to conceal her sorrow and her weakness. Her face covered, and her aching head resting against a chair, she was vainly endeavouring to stifle the deep, and but too audible sobs that escaped her, when, in a voice of the tenderest compassion, she heard herself suddenly addressed by the amazed and benevolent Mr. Lenham—

"My gentle Clarentine," cried he, taking her hand—"whence this excess of grief? Who has been with you? Who is it that has thus cruelly disturbed you?"

Clarentine, looking up, and deeply blushing, replied with a melancholy smile—"The enemy who

has done all this, my dearest Sir, is myself; it is my own folly I lament, and not either the unkindness, or the cruelty of others." Then rising and gently withdrawing her hand—"Excuse my giving you any further explanation"—added she—"and forget, dear Mr. Lenham, if you can, that you ever saw me thus unguardedly expose myself."

So saying, without daring to wait till he spoke to her again, she left him, and ran up to her own room.

In a short time, the voice of Mrs. Barclay, calling to her from the landing-place, once more compelled her to appear. She hastily put on her cloak, and after bathing her eyes, and standing some minutes at the open window, hoping the air would disperse their redness, she armed herself with courage to meet Somerset in case he came out to see them depart, and walked quietly down stairs.

No Somerset, however, appeared. Mrs. Barclay was waiting for her alone at the door, and told her Lucy had changed her mind, and would not go—"So as we have nobody to stay for," added she, "let's be off."

Accordingly they began their walk immediately; Clarentine reviving as they proceeded, and in the consciousness that her secret, tho' unhappily betrayed to Mrs. Hertford, was still utterly unknown to Somerset, and she hoped also, utterly unsuspected by Mr. Lenham, acquiring fortitude patiently to bear whatever other mortification might await her.

At the first shop Mrs. Barclay stopped at, a few minutes after she had entered it, Clarentine heard her very familiarly accosted by a bold, shewy-looking woman who followed them into it, and who, when the first cordial salutations were over, informed her with high glee, that she was just setting off to dine in the city at a friend's house, where, in the evening, there was to be a *grand christening*, and where she expected to meet *all the world and his wife*!

"Now," added she, "if you were good for any thing, Dame Barclay, you'd go along with me. You are quite smart enough, and they know you very well."

Mrs. Barclay, always ready for any thing that could be called *a frolic*, seemed so willing to embrace this proposal, could she but devise some means of acquainting Mr. Lenham where she was gone, that Clarentine very soon perceiving what would be her decision, and dreading to be included in this party, now stepped forward, and said—

"I can deliver to him, madam, any message you please, if this gentleman," turning to the master of the shop, "will have the goodness to permit one of his people to call me a coach."

"Lord, my dear," cried Mrs. Barclay, "what should *you* go home for if I don't? They'll know I'm old enough to keep out of mischief, and I dare say will never be such fools as to trouble their heads about me. As we can't conveniently therefore get any body to carry them word, let's go without, and try to get back the sooner for't in the evening."

To this, as far as related to herself, Clarentine most warmly objected: but Mrs. Barclay, half affronted at her resistance, and totally regardless of her arguments, urged her so vehemently to comply, and so nearly betrayed a disposition to quarrel with her if she did not, that timid and fearful, a reluctant assent was finally drawn from her, and a coach immediately sent for to convey them all three to Goodman's Fields.

After a tedious ride through some of the closest streets in London—streets which to Clarentine, who had all her life been used to breathe the pure air of the country, appeared scarcely fit for human habitation, they at length arrived at their place of destination. What, however, was poor Mrs. Barclay's disappointment, when, on being shewn up into the di-

ning-room, the first intelligence she heard from the mistress of the house, who seemed in consequence, totally unprepared to receive company, was, that her child had been taken ill, and the christening was put off!

"Lord," cried Mrs. Watkins, the lady who had led the mortified Mrs. Barclay thither, "why didn't you send me word so?"

"I did; a note went to your house by ten o'clock this morning."

"Ten o'clock! Lord help you, I was dressed and out before that time."

"I am extremely sorry it happened so," resumed the lady, "but upon my word I could not send sooner."

"Well," cried Mrs. Watkins, recovering from her first consternation, "if the worst comes to the worst, you, and this young lady, Dame Barclay, must go home and dine with me."

"You are very good," said Clarentine, "but we may yet get back to Hampstead in perfect time, and that will be infinitely better on all accounts."

"Lord bless me, Miss Clary," exclaimed Mrs. Barclay, affecting to laugh, yet evidently much displeased at her presuming to answer for her, "you need not be so impatient, for though Mr. Eltham *did* say he'd call to-day, I'll lay my life he'll not set out till evening, and therefore you may safely dine in town without fearing to miss him."

"O, there's a sweet-heart in the case, is there?" cries Mrs. Watkins, facetiously, "I don't so much wonder then at the young lady's unwillingness."

Extremely provoked at these speeches, Clarentine now determined to give up all interference, and quietly to let Mrs. Barclay pursue her own course. She accordingly followed the two ladies back into the coach, which fortunately had not yet been dismissed, and in passive silence heard them give orders to be driven to Long Acre.

On their arrival there, Mrs. Watkins, ushering them into a dark and comfortless back-parlour, in which were two or three noisy, quarrelling children, left them to give orders concerning dinner, and to see the cloth laid in the front room.

"Well," cried Mrs. Barclay, as soon as she was gone, "I've been led into a mighty scrape indeed! It does n't signify, but to be sure she richly deserves all the trouble she'll have. I dare say her cupboard is empty enough! Ten to one if we get a scrap of any thing these two hours."

Clarentine thinking it vain to remonstrate against the indelicacy of accepting an invitation, which must necessarily be attended with so much inconvenience to the person by whom it was made, was silent for some minutes, and then began talking with one of the children, whom finding more intelligent than the rest, she amused herself with during the remainder of the time they waited; whilst Mrs. Barclay, who perhaps had scarcely looked into a book before since she quitted school, took up an old magazine, and sat yawning over it till the dinner was announced.

The instant they rose from table, Mrs. Barclay, by this time as much sickened of her *frolic* as Clarentine had long been before, looked at her watch, and declared it was so late they must "make the best of their way home directly."

"No, no, Dame Barclay," cried Mrs. Watkins, laughing, "not quite so fast neither! Do you know that to make you amends for your balk in Goodman's Fields, I sent off a boy to Hampstead, before we sat down to dinner, to acquaint Mr. Lenham that I should keep you here this evening to go to the play with me? Ay, and what's more," added she, "you may stay and take a bed here if you like."

Joy lighted up every feature in Mrs. Barclay's face at this most welcome intelligence. As eager now to set off for the theatre as she had the moment

before been to return home, she allowed Mrs. Watkins no time to order tea: but like an impatient child, protesting she could not "settle to any thing," and had rather "stand at the play-house door till it was opened, than sit where she was fidgetting and thinking about it an hour before-hand," she persuaded that lady, though it was yet scarcely more than five o'clock, to set out with her immediately, and drew the wearied but unopposing Clarentine, who was allowed no option, away with her.

In any other party, or in any other state of mind, however, the prospect of visiting, for the *first time*, not only a *London* theatre, but a theatre of *any* kind—for hitherto Clarentine had never been to a play in her life—would have afforded her the liveliest pleasure. Nay, as it was, the cheerful animal spirits so natural to her age and genuine character, were insensibly revived at the idea; and though less restless, and less perturbed than her *buxom* companion, she was scarcely less pleased, and scarcely less desirous of reaching the scene of so much expected felicity.

They had not proceeded far, though Mrs. Barclay walked with a swiftness that was almost too much even for the light and active Clarentine, when driving towards them with great rapidity, she perceived Mr. Eltham's carriage, and Eltham himself within it. She shrunk behind her two conductors at this sight, hoping to escape his notice; but Eltham's eyes, quick and discerning, had caught a transient view of her, and before she had time to congratulate herself upon her fancied escape, the carriage suddenly stopped, and he was at her elbow—

"My fair Clarentine!" cried he, with his accustomed impetuosity, "by what fortunate chance have I the happiness of meeting you? Where at such an hour can you be going? and how is it," looking earnestly at her, "I behold you here without *your guardian*?"

Clarentine replying only to his first enquiries, answered—

“ I came to town this morning upon some business, and am now going to the play.”

“ To the play ?” repeated Eltham, “ I am very glad I know it, for I meant to have gone this evening to Hampstead. Are you not very early, however ?”

“ O, that’s no matter ;” said Mrs. Barclay, “ we shall get the better places for’t.”

“ And where, madam,” resumed Eltham, “ may I be allowed to ask, do you mean to sit ?”

“ In the pit,” answered she.

Eltham upon this looked at Clarentine with an air that seemed to imply, “ and do *you* sit there too ?” But Clarentine unconscious of his meaning, and perfectly ignorant which was the best, or which the worst place in the house, remained silent, and walked tranquilly on.

In a few minutes, Eltham, who seemed to have been debating within himself how he should act, and whose carriage during this time had slowly followed him, beckoned to his servant, and bidding him go home, ordered him to tell the coachman likewise, he should not want him again.

Then flying after Clarentine, who regardless of his stopping, had herself proceeded forward, and nearly reached the end of the street.—“ I intend myself the pleasure of going to the play with you,” cried he.

“ Lord, Mr. Eltham,” exclaimed Mrs. Barclay, “ what should you go for ? I dare say you have not dined yet.”

“ My dear madam,” cried Eltham, laughing, “ do you think I am a man of so little taste as not infinitely to prefer *your* company to the gross pleasures of the table ?”

“ I think, at least,” replied Mrs. Barclay drily, “ there is a certain person in the world whom you

infinitely prefer to *every thing*, though I a'n't such a fool as not to know that is'n't *me*!"

"*You do me great injustice,*" resumed he ironically, "for were I, indeed, susceptible of an exclusive attachment, upon whom could I better fix my choice?"

This speech was rather too ambiguous for Mrs. Barclay's powers of comprehension; she felt not its absurdity, nor was pained by its ridicule; and therefore walked on without taking of it the slightest notice.

They were now arrived at the play-house door, which though it yet, as had been foreseen, remained unopened, was already crowded with eager expectants, impatient to gain admission. Eltham cast an anxious look towards Clarentine as they advanced, and saw her turn pale at the scene of confusion in which she was about to be involved. She mechanically caught hold of his arm (which he had before vainly offered) and starting at every loud shout she heard, drawing fearfully back upon the arrival of every fresh party, and dreading to be entirely surrounded, very soon completely lost sight not only of the dauntless Mrs. Barclay, but of her friend.

Eltham, whom her terror concerned, though her reluctance to proceed delighted, moved as she moved, and retreated as she retreated. His manly figure, his height, and commanding aspect secured her from the danger of being spoken to, for no one, seeing her so protected, had the courage to attempt it; but as she had now withdrawn from that part of the crowd where the anxiety and the throng was the greatest, she became an object of much attention to many of the idle lookers on, who without intending to go in, stood unconcerned spectators of the bustle, and whom on all sides Eltham heard remarking—"She's a devilish pretty girl!" "How well she puts on that look of timidity!" "Ay, to be sure, she's no favour-

ite with her companion!"—and many other similar observations, which provoked him so much, that, earnestly addressing her, he at length exclaimed—

" For heaven's sake, my dearest creature, determine upon something, and either try once more to go forward, or suffer me to see you home; for here you are liable to nothing but insult and impertinence!"

Startled by this remonstrance, and now for the first time, perceiving the offensive curiosity she had excited, she endeavoured to gain more courage, and agreed to move on. The doors opened at the same moment, and a general rush immediately ensuing, she was instantly enclosed on every side, impelled irresistibly forward, and pressed, staggered, and overpowered to so great a degree, that after vainly contending for some time, in agonies unspeakable with the fearful apprehensions that seized her, she lost all command over herself, and uttering a piercing shriek, fell back without sense or motion in Eltham's arms.

To describe the consternation and distress with which he was filled at that moment would be impossible. Encompassed by a set of people, who, callous and unmoved, stared with vacant surprise at his speechless burden, and then proceeded forward in thoughtless indifference to her fate, it seemed to require almost supernatural strength to repel the torrent that oppressed him, or to force himself a passage through it. Rage, however, and indignation lent him vigour, and in defiance of every obstacle, sternly commanding those about him to make way, terrifying some by threats, and subduing others by entreaty, he at length accomplished his purpose, and bore her safely, though still inanimate, to the first shop he found open.

The compassionate assistance that was there afforded her, in a very short time brought her back to life and recollection. She smiled gratefully upon Eltham for his care and attention, and thanking the

woman of the shop, who with much civility pressed her to stay till she was more recovered, declaring herself perfectly able to go, and begged to have a coach sent for, that she might return home immediately.

"I think, indeed," said Eltham, "that will be your best plan: but you still seem too much hurried and discomposed to remove so soon. Sit here a few minutes longer, and let me before you enter the coach see some degree of colour return to your cheeks, and some of their usual vivacity re-animate your eyes. You are now by much too wan and ghostly a figure to be trusted beyond the reach of assistance."

Clarentine wishing to send either a note or message to Mrs. Watkins, to assure Mrs. Barclay, on her return from the play, of her safety, agreed to a few minutes delay on that account, and writing upon the back of a letter, as legibly as her yet unsteady hand would allow her, a few lines to that effect, she committed them to the care of the mistress of the shop, who promised they should be safely delivered.

A boy belonging to the house was then despatched for a coach, and Clarentine hearing it approach, arose to go.

Eltham, taking her hand to lead her out, said "I make no apology, Miss Delmington, for presuming to accompany you; ill as you have been it is absolutely necessary you should not go alone. Nay," continued he, observing that with a look of extreme seriousness, she was about to speak, "do not attempt to oppose it, for upon this occasion you will find me as absolute as *yourself*."

He then made a passing bow to the mistress of the shop, and handing Clarentine into the coach, jumped in after her, and directed the coachman whither to drive.

Clarentine observing a profound silence for some minutes after they were seated, Eltham, a little piqued, at length said—

" My dearest Miss Delmington, I perceive with concern, that upon the present, as upon every other occurrence, I have had the misfortune to displease you. Why, however, should it be so? Why cannot you consider me in a more friendly view? Have I so totally sunk myself in your good opinion, so utterly forfeited all title to your confidence, that, at a moment like this—requiring protection, yet alone, and unattended—you fear to trust yourself with me?"

Clarentine ashamed and distressed, scarcely knew what answer to make to a speech so serious, and so reproachful; she stammered out, however, a few words of scarcely intelligible acknowledgment; and then, seeking to change the subject, said—

" How long will it be, sir, before you go down to Welwyn park? I understand you meant to spend there the greatest part of the shooting season?"

" I did ;" replied Eltham—" but motives, which, if I dared, I would frankly acknowledge to you, have detained me in town. Are you *very* impatient, however, for my departure?"

" Would an answer in the affirmative," asked Clarentine smiling, " be remarkably civil?"

" Perhaps not: but from *you* I dispense with *civility*, in favour of *candour*. Speak to me then as you think, and honestly say, do you wish me to go?"

" I really wish you to do nothing but what most suits your own convenience. You cannot suppose, Mr. Eltham, I have any desire to take upon myself the direction of your conduct!"

" A more *jesuitical* personage than you are," cried Eltham, " I scarcely ever met with; you seem to have made the art of prevarication your peculiar study, and have obtained a degree of proficiency in it, that does honour to your application!"

He then attempted to turn the conversation upon the subject of Somerset: but that was a point on which Clarentine was impenetrable indeed! and on

which her answers were so laconic and so guarded, that Eltham, renewing his reproaches, and proceeding so far as even openly to accuse her of dissimulation, awakened in her a species of indignation which drew from her a retort so spirited, and so severe, that, silenced and offended in his turn, one of those mutual and almost sullen pauses ensued, the consequence, so frequently, of his vehemence and impetuosity.

He was the first, however, at length to speak—

“ Upon my honour,” said he, in a tone which, though it proved him still a little angry, was more good-humoured than Clarentine expected, “ I sincerely believe we were destined to be, time immemorial, had no malign influence stepped in between us, a pair of *true* and *veritable* lovers! We quarrel with, we provoke and affront each other with all the persevering ingenuity imaginable! Every perverse practice that lovers are said to delight in, we likewise perpetually run into. All that is wanting to complete the resemblance, are the enchanting transitions from anger to forgiveness—the delicious *reconciliations* that usually follow these short-lived tempests!”

“ I should think very ill,” said Clarentine, “ of a lover, who made it his study wantonly to *offend*, merely to have the pleasure of *appeasing* me.”

“ Do you then prefer the lifeless insipidity of an attachment composed only of smiles, and monotonous serenity, to the animated and ever-varying transports of a passion, which sometimes breaks out into petulance and caprice, then melts again into tenderness and complacency?”

Clarentine with a smile, replied—

“ Calmness and serenity, however *monotonous* or *insipid*, I should always prefer to such transient, and unreasonable transports.”

“ Ah, Clarentine!” exclaimed he, almost involun-

tarily seizing her hand, "I cannot, I do not believe you! The brilliancy, the sparkling intelligence of your eyes, the glow of sensibility diffused over your whole countenance, convinces me it is impossible a love so cold, so languid, should constitute the sole emotion of your heart! you were born to *inspire* and to *participate* in sentiments far more animated and fervent!"

Clarentine, extremely disgusted at the incorrigible freedom that led him perpetually to address her in a strain so flighty and improper—particularly, as that freedom never so offensively displayed itself as when they were alone, and therefore seemed to wear the aspect of design and premeditation—now said very gravely—

"Mr. Eltham, I am unwilling to entertain so very ill an opinion of you, as to suppose the continual uneasiness you occasion me by such extraordinary language can be *intentional*: but as I perceive that to talk to me at all, and to talk to me in a manner that gives me pain, is with you invariably the same thing, be assured this is the *last time* that any circumstance, whatever, short of absolute compulsion, shall again induce me to accept your attendance, or commit myself to your care!"

This timely and serious rebuke, immediately convinced Eltham he had presumed too far upon the well-known placability of her disposition, and could not be too quick in seeking to make his peace. He immediately therefore—and with unwonted humility—endeavoured to obtain her pardon; protested he would make it the study of his whole life never in the same manner to offend her again; and, for the rest of the way, miraculously kept his promise!

CHAPTER XI.

ON their arrival at Hampstead, Mr. Lenham hearing her voice in the entrance, and surprised, after the message he had received, at her early return, hastened out to meet and welcome her. Clarentine rushed forward the instant he appeared, and delighted once again to be restored to his protection, was beginning an account of her adventures, when perceiving immediately behind him, regarding her with an air of grave and frigid solemnity, Captain Somerset! her voice faltered, she turned pale, and scarcely able to refrain from tears, walked dejectedly into the parlour without venturing to speak, or look up again.

They all followed her; and Mr. Lenham taking her hand, and addressing her with the kindest solicitude, said—

“ I fear, my dear young friend, the troubles and the fatigues of the day have been too much for you. You look harassed and dispirited; tell me, where did Mrs. Barclay lead you? Where is she now, and how came you back without her?”

Clarentine, in answer to these friendly interrogatories, now made an effort to speak, and as briefly as she could recounted all that had befallen her. Then casting a timid glance towards Somerset, who yet silent and thoughtful, sat leaning against the table in an attitude of profound attention, she forced a smile, and said—

“ Though *you*, my dear Mr. Lenham, kindly suspended your judgment, till you heard my defence—*others*, I fear, have been less candid!”

Somerset, looking hurt and surprised, rose from his seat, and begun walking about the room in evident agitation; whilst Mr. Lenham said—

“ You deceive yourself, my dear young lady; we

were all persuaded that your delay was as involuntary as it was alarming ; and when Mrs. Watkins's messenger came, and Captain Somerset, who is but this moment returned from town where he dined, learnt it was designed to carry you to the play, his uneasiness on your account was so great, that just as you arrived, he was upon the point of setting off for London again, to endeavour to assist you in getting out, and to see you safe home."

" My interference, however," said Somerset, suspending his walk whilst he spoke, and then slowly proceeding, " would have been superfluous ; I knew not at the moment I planned it, how well Miss Dellington was attended already."

" Mr. Eltham," cried Clarentine, cruelly disconcerted by the coldness and seriousness with which this was uttered, " met me by mere accident ; and I am certain, till the instant I was taken ill, had no intention of returning with me."

" At all events," resumed Somerset, " my services would have been of little worth, and perhaps I have reason to congratulate myself that their untimely offer met not with a *second* rejection."

Eltham, who during this little dialogue had, by turns, surveyed the two speakers with looks of astonishment and curiosity, now gaily said—

" The novelty of this scene is really enchanting ! On one side we behold a grave and venerable man," bowing to Mr. Lenham, " who in his capacity of Guardian, though anxious for the welfare of his ward, is mild and gentle ; willing to credit her vindication, and desirous of restoring her to confidence. On the other," looking towards Somerset, " lo ! where there stands a young, but (pardon the expression) incredulous and rigid censor, who in *his* capacity of Guardian, though tenacious of his privileges, does nothing to secure them ; and who assuming the austerity that belongs in general only to age, leaves, at

once, the gallantry and the indulgence of youth, to his senior in office.

Somerset, who towards the end of this speech had stopped short and sternly listened to its conclusion, with his eyes steadily fixed upon Eltham, was now beginning some very sarcastic reply to it, when Mr. Lenham interposing, said—

“Captain Somerset, it cannot really be your intention seriously to resent this speech? a speech uttered in raillery, and meant but as a good-humoured re-proof of your gravity.”

Somerset checked himself; and though his countenance resumed not immediately all its wonted calmness, forbore saying any thing farther.

Meanwhile, the grieved and humbled Clarentine, one moment petrified at Somerset’s chilling indifference, the next frightened at his apprehended asperity, sat motionless and silent, with her eyes fixed upon the floor, and her whole heart so saddened and so depressed, that it was with the utmost difficulty she kept her place, or knew how to disperse the tears that were every instant ready to start.

The sight of this dejection, the paleness of her countenance, and the remembrance of the distressing scene he had witnessed in the morning, excited Mr. Lenham’s utmost inquietude and concern. He moved towards her, and whilst Eltham was speaking to Miss Barclay, who at that moment entered, and Somerset with affected unconcern was looking over the newspaper, intreated her, in the most anxious and pressing terms, to tell him what it was that caused in her so melancholy a change?

Clarentine, overpowered by this gentleness and sympathy, and no longer able to command the tears she had so long struggled to restrain, now said in a low and faltering voice—

“Oh, do not, dearest Sir, do not speak to me with this oppressing kindness, I conjure you! Could I,

dared I confide in any one, it should be in you : but mine is a secret that *ought not* to be told !”

“ You amaze me !” cried he, “ what secret can be deposited in a heart so guileless and so pure as yours, that you need blush to reveal ?”

“ Alas, Sir !” exclaimed Clarentine, sighing, “ how little you suspect the state of that heart you seek thus benevolently to penetrate. It is filled at this moment with every evil passion. Pride, resentment, envy and ingratitude assail it by turns ; and, oh Sir, assail it so forcibly, that I know not how to repel them !”

Mr. Lenham inexpressibly astonished at this speech, looked at her a few minutes in silent consternation ; then fearing they might be observed, said—

“ This is no place in which to solicit you for an explanation ; but to-morrow I hope you will not refuse to gratify a curiosity you have so painfully raised !”

Clarentine’s heart was too full to speak, and Mr. Lenham, kindly pressing her hand as he arose, walked away.

A few minutes after Eltham took his seat, and earnestly examining her, at length abruptly said—

“ Has Mr. Lenham been playing the same part your *other* guardian did ? You have been weeping, Miss Delmington ; you seem distressed—Wherefore ? What has occasioned it ?”

Too much disturbed to attend to him, Clarentine, turned from his enquiring eye with embarrassment and uneasiness, and assuring him he had mistaken fatigue for sorrow, besought him to leave her—

“ I will ;” cried he, rising immediately, “ it would be barbarous at such a time to importune you longer.”

He then rejoined the party round the table ; and Clarentine perceiving she might quit the room without being observed, very soon after went up stairs.

The tacit consent she had given to Mr. Lenham’s request of an explanation the next day, there recur-

red to her with the most painful sensations of self reproach. Should she, acknowledging her weakness to Somerset's most approved and established friend, voluntarily put herself in danger of having it betrayed to Somerset himself? The idea was insupportable!

"Who I," cried she, "I be the publisher of my own disgrace? I empower any one to report to him a confession so humiliating; disclose not only my love, but my disappointment, my vain wishes, my jealousy and regret? No, never! Somerset's indifference I may learn to bear; but to become the object either of his pity or his contempt would be too much!"

The result of these angry self interrogatories was, a fixed determination assiduously to shun the half-promised but mortifying conference to which she expected to be called; or, if unavoidably drawn into it, frankly to declare she already repented having even gone so far, and most earnestly wished Mr. Lenham would release her from an engagement she found it so difficult to fulfil.

"Perhaps," cried she, "he may at first, be tempted to accuse me of caprice and inconsistency; he may justly wonder, that whilst, at one moment, I speak with such unguarded openness as even to lead to a supposition I *wish* to be penetrated, the next, I should thus strangely recant. Far better, however, is it, he should conjecture the worst from my silence, than for a single instant imagine my confidence is intended as a call upon his compassion, and granted merely with a view of exciting him to plead for me with Somerset! *Plead for me!*" added she indignantly, "Good God, in such circumstances as mine—in *any* circumstances *plead* for the favour of a man decidedly attached to another! Oh Somerset! low as I am sunk, hopeless, grieved, and dispirited as I feel, not even to obtain *your* commiseration would I subject myself to the suspicion of a meanness so abject!"

The pride which thus seasonably came to her support, aided by reason and cooler reflection, now led her also to ask herself, why she indulged against him a degree of resentment, which, free as he was to choose for himself, and painfully as it embittered her own existence, was, at once, so unjust, and so irrational? He was under no engagement to her; had never professed for her any other sentiments than those of friendship, and undesigning regard. Had she any right then, either to manifest open blame, or cherish secret displeasure? Was it not as degrading to evince such unwarranted petulance, as even to betray her unreturned partiality?—She felt, she acknowledged it: and firmly determined henceforward to reform her conduct; and, if not too late, once more to seek his *friendship*, though she renounced all claim to his *love*.—“I owe,” thought she, “this effort to my own character; I owe it to Somerset’s past kindness and attention. My reserve, my coldness, inexplicable to him as it must appear after all the confidence and cordiality I lately shewed him, can only tend to infuse into his mind as unfavourable an opinion of my temper as of my heart. He can never know whence the change originated; and consequently can never impute it to any better cause than versatility and fickleness of disposition.”

In pursuance of these reflections, composing her countenance before she descended to supper, and determining to meet Somerset with all the friendly cheerfulness in her power, she entered the parlour so fully expecting to find him there, and so anxiously solicitous to prove the effect of her newly adopted plan, that when she found he was already gone—gone without asking to see her, without leaving for her the slightest message, or appearing to remember she was in the house—her intended exertions were forgotten, her spirits again failed her, and heartless, desponding and afflicted, she took her place in utter

silence, and too absent to join in the conversation, had she even wished it, listened to all Eltham's gay rattle, (for he still remained) with the most insurmountable and involuntary gravity, and the first moment it was in her power, hastened back to her own apartment.

The following day passed without any remarkable occurrence, unless the absence of Somerset, whom she had hitherto, since his return from sea, rarely omitted seeing or hearing from during some part of every day, could be called such. Mrs. Barclay, after sleeping in town, returned to dinner in high spirits; declared she had never been so much entertained; laughed at Clarentine for the *unaccountable* terror that had so strangely overpowered her at the play-house door; and finally, received a very tart reprimand from her fair daughter, for not having sent Mrs. Watkins's messenger early enough to allow of her getting to town in time to make one of their party.

The mother defended herself with her accustomed *sang froid*, and the daughter persevered in her complaints with her accustomed querulousness, till Clarentine, equally wearied of them and their subject, took up her work, and left them to finish the dispute by themselves.

The anxious looks of Mr. Lenham, his eagerness to speak to her, and the manifest concern and displeasure with which he observed her sedulousness to avoid it, gave her so much pain, and at the same time embarrassed her so cruelly in his presence, that towards evening, retiring for a few minutes to her own room, she wrote the following note, and delivered it to him unperceived, as they were rising from tea—

“ To see you, my dearest Sir, look so offended and so grave, occasions me the greatest uneasiness. I acknowledge that you have just cause, after what passed

last night, to resent my present reserve, since for one who meant to say *no more*, I certainly then said infinitely *too much*: but I spoke inconsiderately, and at that moment was not aware of the strange confidence to which I seemed to be leading. Calmer reflections, dear Sir, have taught me to believe you would yourself disapprove my proceeding farther; and the pain that it would give to your benevolent mind, to know the true source of my concern without possessing the power of alleviating it, would, I am certain, induce you rather to condemn than applaud the facility with which it was revealed.

“Attempt not then, dearest sir, to discover more plainly the secrets of this wayward heart; disturb not, perplex not yourself about me. I am unworthy, at this instant, of your generous attention. When time, however, shall have restored me to reason, and I can look back upon the events that are now passing with indifference and tranquillity, then will I, at the same moment that I call for your congratulations, teach you to smile at my former folly, and join with you in moralising upon the instability, as well of human happiness, as human sorrow !”

This billet, though it quieted not all Mr. Lenham’s uneasy apprehensions, softened him in favour of the gentle writer, and made him cautious either of again questioning, or appearing to watch her. Tenderly solicitous to promote her happiness; loving her as a father; and anxious by every possible means to avert affliction from her, it is not to be supposed, however, he could so easily relinquish the earnest desire he had to investigate into a mystery so alarming, and so extraordinary. His observation increased, therefore, with his wish to conceal it; and all Clarentine’s future prudence, all her care and her discretion, were scarcely adequate to the difficulty of evading his penetration.

She had now steadily adhered to her new plan of conduct for some days—treated Somerset with all her former ease and complacency—revived, in some measure, his wonted cheerfulness—resumed her old habits—read, walked, and conversed with him, as on his first arrival ; and, though she had never yet been put to the trial, determined even when alone with him to behave with the same friendliness and unreserve ; when, one morning soon after breakfast, whilst she was sitting by herself in the parlour, he unexpectedly entered, but stopping short on perceiving her, seemed to hesitate a moment whether he should advance, and then shutting the door slowly approached her.

“ I have wished, my dear Miss Delmington, for some time,” said he, sitting down by her, and after a short silence, gravely addressing her, “ to have a few minutes private conversation with you. Are you at leisure now ? and may I venture to speak with all the sincerity you formerly authorised ?”

Clarentine, too much confounded by the seriousness of his looks and voice, and the intelligible, though gentle reproach his last words conveyed, to be able immediately to answer him, Somerset perceiving her embarrassment, added with a half smile—

“ What is it, my dearest Miss Delmington apprehends ? Does she believe me so *very* a censor as I was described to her ? Does my *austerity* so much alarm her, that she even fears to speak to me ?”

“ O no, no !” cried Clarentine with quickness, “ I am ready, I am anxious to hear, and to answer every question you can ask. I have no fears but of having, perhaps, of late, too justly merited your disapprobation !”

“ Discard, discard from your mind,” cried Somerset, earnestly, “ all such vain and causeless terrors ! To *disapprove* I claim no right, even if I had the will ; I am *not*, Miss Delmington, the severe and ar-

bitrary monitor you suspect ! Could you forget that such a connexion as guardian and ward subsisted between us, and view me only as a brother and a friend —a friend whom in former times you used to trust—a brother whom you once, I believe, loved—then should I fearlessly proceed, and frankly avow the motives that urged me to request this conference."

" Proceed then, unhesitatingly," cried Clarentine, with warmth ; " speak with the certainty of being only interpreted as you could wish !"

Softened and delighted by this speech, Somerset appeared half tempted to imprint upon the hand he held a kiss of gratitude and acknowledgment. He restrained himself, however, and resuming the discourse, in a tone of more than usual gentleness and kindness, said—

" Could I describe to Miss Delmington the anxious solicitude with which, not only *now* but *ever*, I have wished to see her happy ; could she form any idea of the deep and animated interest I take in all that relates to her, the question I am about to ask would require no other apology than the affectionate sentiment by which it is dictated ; as she can have no conception, however, of that sentiment—of half its zeal and fervour—I must rely upon her indulgence, and the rectitude of my own intentions for pardon."

He then went on to enquire, for Clarentine was too much agitated to interrupt him, with all the considerate delicacy the subject demanded, how long she had been acquainted with Mr. Eltham ? What she believed were his views in coming so frequently to the house, and paying her such marked attention ? and what her own opinion and designs respecting him were ?

" If, my lovely friend," added he, " you have any reason to suspect him of being a mere *idle flirt*, one of those despicable and presuming coxcombs, known

under the denomination of *male-coquettes*, the more speedily you authorise either Mr. Lenham or *me*, (in my formidable *capacity of Guardian*) to discard him—or, if you prefer it, the more speedily you announce to him his dismission yourself, the more just it will be to your own character. If, on the contrary, as appears far more probable, his designs are serious and honourable, and are, besides, such as you approve, and feel willing to encourage, the sooner, through the interference of some friend, he is brought to declare them”—

“The *better*?” asked Clarentine, interrupting him in a faint voice, and turning extremely pale, “the better, do you think, Mr. Somerset?”

Somerset changed colour, looked irresolute and disconcerted, and casting down his eyes, after a short pause, replied—

“I acknowledge myself by no means a competent judge in this case either of the *better* or the *worse*. Your own heart, Miss Delmington, must determine for you; and if I have presumed too far, I entreat your forgiveness; it was not, you will believe, I hope, my design to *dictate* its decision.”

“O no,” cried Clarentine recovering herself, “that I am persuaded of!—But Sir, before we drop this subject—a subject painful to me to talk upon and I am sure, by no means pleasant to you, further than as it enables you to prove your general good wishes and concern for me—suffer me to intreat that on no account whatever *you* will speak upon it to Mr. Eltham. All that I may wish should be said, I will either request Mr. Lenham to repeat for me, or undertake to tell him myself!”

Somerset only bowed; he ventured not to ask what that *all* would be, neither did he choose to pursue the conversation. After a short interval, therefore, rising, and taking his hat, he said he was going back to town; asked if she had any commands, and on her

saying, "none," wished her good morning and left the room.

"To what," thought Clarentine, when he was gone, "to what could this singular conversation tend? Does he really *wish* me to encourage Eltham? Were his enquiries only meant to find out my real sentiments concerning him, or was it their aim to prove to me that he was ready to favour another's pretensions? Incomprehensible Somerset! In voice, in looks, so tender and so anxious, in heart so regardless and so indifferent! Oh, why address me in language so flattering, talk to me of his *solicitude*, his *affection*, and his *zeal*, and at the same moment, by the tranquil unconcern with which he shews himself ready to resign me, plant a dagger in my breast!"

During the remainder of the day, as he appeared no more, she had leisure to deliberate with herself concerning the part she had now to act with Eltham. Superior to all coquetry—unacquainted indeed, but by report, either with its artifices or its nature, she found no difficulty, as it was her decided wish to be released from his assiduities, in coming to the resolution of immediately putting an end to them; yet how, in her own person, was this to be effected? She could not tell him she believed him to be in love with her—apprehended he had formed presumptuous expectations—and thought it her duty to check them! He had never but once formally avowed himself—and that once, the only time his language at any period took the form of a positive declaration, though he had proffered to her his *heart*, his *fortune*, sworn even to dedicate his very *life* to her; his *hand*, or his *faith*, had never been comprised in the enumeration! To treat him, consequently, as a serious pretender, would be absurd—would be almost like *asking* for his addresses, and telling him they were expected. All, therefore, that she had to do, was to trust the business to the management of Mr. Lenham; to beg

him in his own name, and as if wholly at his own instigation, to represent to him the impropriety of his constant visits, and to declare to him, very positively, that they could no longer be permitted.

A commission Mr. Lenham would have felt himself more gladly disposed to accept, could not have been devised. Eltham's wild and flighty disposition; the selfishness and indelicacy with which—solely for his own amusement, without appearing to have any determinate object—he pursued, and trifled with a young woman not only of such unimpeachable character, but also of such respectable connexions, and such modest and unequivocal propriety of behaviour, had long offended him extremely; it was therefore with the utmost readiness he undertook to execute the task assigned him, the very first time Eltham again came to the house.

CHAPTER XII.

THE admiration which Miss Barclay had conceived, even from the first hour she beheld him, for Mr. Eltham; the veneration she had for his splendid advantages of birth and fortune; the striking superiority of his fashionable deportment, and easy address over those of every other man she had till now conversed with, had so powerfully operated in his behalf, that, without its being necessary, according to Sophia's advice, for Clarentine to interfere in the business, she had indulged (unchecked either by her own pride or his neglect) a very tender though, hitherto it must be acknowledged, very unprosperous predilection for him. The hard-hearted and persevering indifference, however, with which she daily observed that Clarentine received his attentions; the almost positive opinion she began to entertain that even were he to

offer himself to her she would reject him, had of late infused into her mind a faint hope, that, by pursuing with him the same conduct Mrs. Hertford had adopted with respect to Capt. Somerset, she might succeed, perhaps, in detaching him from so ungrateful a mistress, and win him over to herself.

It now, therefore, became her constant study, by every method in her power, to attract his notice, and engage his admiration; her dress, her language, her attitudes, her very voice betrayed the anxiety with which she not only prepared for his arrival, but sought, when he was present, to make herself conspicuous. Had *he* been grave and reserved, *she* would have attempted to appear soft and pensive—as it was, seeing him always easy and careless; often—to her at least,—impertinent; sometimes negligent and indolent, at others, active and animated, she endeavoured to model her own character upon his, and by turns to imitate every change that either accident or design produced in his behaviour.

When Clarentine was not present, exclusively to engross his attention, there were moments when, in preference to sitting wholly unemployed, he would vouchsafe with an air of condescension, and frequently in the midst of a yawn, to address to her a few unmeaning exaggerated compliments, for the mere pleasure of seeing her look languishing and affected. Once or twice, he had even given himself the trouble, called upon by her repeated though indirect challenges, to romp with her; and after tearing her clothes, tiring and overpowering her, (for on these occasions he was seldom extremely gentle) used to throw himself into a seat very composedly, and as he lounged back in his chair, amused himself with laughing at the strange plight he had put her into, and the disconsolate figure she cut!

As Miss Barclay neither possessed great refinement, nor great penetration, she was as little disposed

to resent his freedom, as she was capable of discerning what his real sentiments concerning her were. All she aspired to was his attention; and proud of obtaining it in any way whatever, to the more, or the less respect with which it came accompanied, she was totally indifferent.

It was on the third day after Clarentine's little explanation with Somerset, that at his usual hour, just as the family had met to tea, Eltham, for the first time since the night he had accompanied her from town, made his appearance. The party he found assembled, in addition to Mr. Lenham's usual inmates, consisted of Mrs. Denbigh, and Mrs. Hertford. Somerset had been there before dinner, but went away in less than an hour.

Clarentine's reception of him, as at all other times, was civil, but quiet and composed. Not so Miss Barclay; her eyes danced with pleasure the moment he entered; with an eagerness and officiousness that made even Mrs. Hertford stare, she drove young Blandford from the tea-table, and disturbed every body else at it, to make room for him next her; looked at, spoke to no other person during the whole time he sat by her; and in short, behaved with such extreme folly and forwardness, that Eltham, by no means the last to perceive it, had some difficulty more than once, to forbear laughing in her face.

As soon as the tea-things were removed, Clarentine, who, though she made it a point when Mrs. Barclay was alone to sit with her in an evening, thought herself exempted from this necessity, when the contrary was the case, rose to leave the room; but Eltham abruptly starting up, and stepping between her and the door, said in a low and supplicating voice, as she still advanced towards it—

“ You do not mean to consign me over to this intolerable circle the whole evening?”

“ Intolerable!” repeated Clarentine in the same

tone, "Is Mr. Lenham, is Mrs. Denbigh intolera-
ble?"

"If they were angels," answered Eltham, taking her hand to lead her back, "when you are gone, I shall wish them all utterly annihilated!" then raising his voice, "What have you done, my dear Miss Delmington, with your harp? Do you never play now?"

"Yes," replied Clarentine, who rather than occasion any further contention, had walked back to her seat, "sometimes."

"Suppose, my young friend," said Mrs. Denbigh, "you have it brought down this evening, and at-
tempt by

"A solemn air, and the best comforter
"To an unsettled fancy,"*

to quiet and tranquillise Mr. Eltham?"

"An excellent proposal;" cried Mrs. Hertford smiling, "though one that, I own, seems to be applying to Mr. Eltham something too much of the nature of the *Tarantula*!"

"I am not," said Eltham, "to be laughed out of my purpose; therefore, Miss Delmington, suffer me to entreat you *will* send for it, or permit—what I should still prefer—my attending you to your own apartment to hear you."

"A modest petition, truly!" cried Miss Barclay sneeringly, "I hope Miss Delmington means to comply with it."

Clarentine's only answer to this was a request that Miss Barclay, who sat nearest it, would ring the bell to order the harp down stairs.

It was soon brought; and Clarentine, who had now taken regular lessons of a master for some time, and really played with admirable taste and expression, astonished and charmed Eltham so much by the extraordinary progress she had made since he last heard

her at Sidmouth, that he would not suffer her to rise, till the repeated yawns of Mrs. Barclay, and the loud talking of her daughter, warned her, by immediately stopping, not to lull the one to sleep, or rouse the other to impatience.

Eltham thanked her, when she got up, in the most animated terms, for the extreme pleasure she had given him, and was proceeding to ask her some questions concerning the music she had been playing, when Miss Barclay peevishly interrupting him said—

“ I fancy, Mr. Eltham, you would not be so fond of such dolorous ditties if you was’n’t in love ? ”

“ Every body stared, and Eltham, after a moment of astonished silence, said with a forced smile—

“ And who told you, my fair interrogator, that I was in love ? ”

“ O, Lord,” cried she, “ we all know *that*, and with *who* too ! ”

Then darting an angry glance at Clarentine, who, amazed and confounded, stood gravely looking at her, with her usual abruptness when any thing discomposed her, she left the room.

A dead silence succeeded her departure for some minutes ; Mrs. Denbigh, however, who sat near the fire before which Eltham was standing, at length interrupted it, by saying to him in a low voice, and with an arch smile—

“ If your heart was not gone already, you could have no chance of resisting the amiable creature who has just left us ! ”

Eltham, perfectly regardless of the presence either of her mother or her friend, coolly answered, as he leaned negligently back against the side of the chimney—

“ Love is a calmer, gentler joy,
“ Smooth are his looks, and soft his pace ;
“ Her Cupid is a blackguard boy,
“ And runs his link full in your face ! ”

This ridiculous, but apt quotation, conquered the gravity not only of Mrs. Denbigh, Mrs. Hertford and Clarentine, but even of Mr. Lenham. Mrs. Barclay, however, who, though she but imperfectly understood its direct tenour, very fully comprehended the unfortunate term *blackguard*, and felt herself extremely offended by it, now said with great solemnity—

“Let me tell you, Mr. Eltham, these are very strange liberties to take before me; I should be glad to know why Lucy, though may-be she *is* a little pettish sometimes, should be called such low-lived names as them? I’m sure she’s done nothing *blackguard* by you; and as for talking of *links*, I don’t know what you can mean by it!”

Eltham bit his lips, and looking down as if apprehensive his laughing eyes would betray him, said with some hesitation—

“Upon my word, my dearest madam, you totally misunderstood me. I was far from intending any improper allusion to Miss Barclay, be assured; there is nobody I protest to you, that does her more justice—that sees her real merit in a clearer point of view!”

“Well, well,” cried Mrs. Barclay, somewhat appeased by this *very satisfactory* apology, “we won’t say any more about it; I suppose you didn’t mean any harm, and I might not quite make out what you were talking of; for, to tell you the truth, I know but little of these matters, and never was over and above fond of poetry and verses in my life.”

The extreme good humour and credulous simplicity of this speech, really made Eltham half repent having ever been wicked enough to say any thing that would give her pain. He renewed his excuses and assurances of respect with infinitely more seriousness than before; and then, finding himself perfectly restored to her good graces, changed the subject and gave the conversation a more general turn.

When he was rising to take leave, Mr. Lenham, authorised by an intelligent look from Clarentine, begged the favour of speaking with him a few minutes in his study. Eltham, though the request seemed to surprise him, immediately agreed to it, and wishing the ladies good night, took up his hat and followed him.

As soon as they were gone, Clarentine apprehensive of she knew not what, fearful of seeing Eltham, should he, after the conference was over, again return to the parlour ; half wishing, yet half dreading, to hear its result ; and by no means assured, proud and fiery as she well knew he could be, that he would not break out into some act of extravagance and impatience, put up her work in haste and alarm, and flew for refuge to her own room, determined not to venture down again till positively convinced he had left the house.

In less than half an hour, young Blandford knocked at her door to tell her Mr. Lenham was in the parlour, and supper was ready.

“ And where is Mr. Eltham ? ” cried Clarentine eagerly—

“ On his road to London, I suppose,” answered Blandford—

“ He is not below, then ? —not in the parlour, you are sure ? ”

“ Yes, quite sure ; he has never been there since you left it.”

Clarentine upon this opened her door, and telling Blandford she was ready, accompanied him down stairs.

As she entered the supper-room, Mr. Lenham, she perceived, was walking slowly about it, looking unusually grave and thoughtful. Every body else was standing round the table waiting for him to sit down : he seemed not to observe it, however, till Clarentine appeared, when silently taking her hand,

he led her towards her accustomed seat, and then walked to his own.

During the whole time they were at table, Clarentine watched his countenance with the most anxious attention. By degrees the passing cloud that had obscured it dispersed ; he looked up at her with his wonted friendly cheerfulness ; joined freely in the conversation, and before they rose from supper seemed wholly to have forgotten the little chagrin he had experienced.

This change gave her inexpressible pleasure ; yet still eager to question him, contrary to her usual custom she lingered below till almost every body had quitted the parlour, and then as he was lighting his candle to go also, softly approached him, and said in a whisper—

“ May I, dear sir, attend you for a moment to your study ? ”

“ Yes, certainly,” replied he ; and immediately went out with her.

When they were alone, “ Well, Sir,” cried Clarentine, hesitatingly, “ how did your conference with Mr. Eltham terminate ? Amicably, I hope ? ”

“ On *my* part,” answered Mr. Lenham, “ perfectly so ; I was firm yet civil ; and when I saw how ill his pride brooked the affront, almost tempted to feel sorry for him.”

Clarentine smiled—“ I should never have supposed,” said she, “ Mr. Lenham’s pity could have been called forth by such a passion.—But tell me, dear Sir,” added she more gravely, “ has he promised to discontinue his visits in future ? —May I flatter myself his assiduities are entirely at an end ? ”

“ I believe you may ; but not that if he meets with either *you* or *me* in the dark, he will hesitate to cut our throats.”

“ Horrible ! ” exclaimed Clarentine, “ was he then so *very* irascible ? ”—

"I never before saw a man take such incredible pains to prove himself qualified for Bedlam or St. Luke's. He raved, he threatened, he absolutely, I believe, swore! and when he had vented all his choler against *us*, proceeded next to utter such vehement denunciations against the devoted Somerset"—

"Good God!" interrupted Clarentine turning pale, "against Captain Somerset?"—

"Be not alarmed," resumed Mr. Lenham smiling; "these outrageous ebullitions are never, I believe, very dangerous; were they to last long, they would infallibly destroy the strongest constitution in Christendom, and Mr. Eltham knows better the value of his than to put it to such a risk. After storming and execrating, therefore, till he was completely tired, finding I made him no answer, but went on very composedly mending my fire, he sat down to cool, and ended the conversation with as much temperance as I believe it is in his nature to feel."

"In his calmer moments then, Sir," asked Clarentine, did he say any thing that disturbed you more than in his fury? You looked, I thought, extremely vexed and serious when I first went down."

"To deal plainly with you, my dear Miss Delymington," answered Mr. Lenham, "he made an appeal to my *justice*, towards the latter part of our conference, that embarrassed me not a little. I had given him, tacitly at least, to understand that *you* were unacquainted with the nature of our debate; this he seemed very much to doubt: but admitting it, at length, for fact, he asked me, with all the gravity of a man who thinks himself highly aggrieved, whether, after the species of promise he had once obtained from *you*, that when fixed in my house you would admit his visits upon the footing of a friend, I thought myself entitled, unknown to *you*, to deny

him this privilege? Whether, in short, I thought it just to *him*, or honourable to *you*?"

"Mr. Eltham," cried Clarentine, a little indignantly, "is the only man breathing, I believe, who knowing *how* and *where* that promise was exacted, would have ventured to speak of it to you as of one that he *deserved* should be kept. It was on my journey from Sidmouth, the night I slept at Salisbury, that, after having persecuted and frightened me till I was really glad to come to any compromise whatever, he drew it reluctantly from me, upon condition he consented immediately to quit me. This, at length he did; and hitherto it has been solely in consideration of that engagement, extorted as it was, I have ever permitted him to see me."

"All this, my dear young lady," said Mr. Lenham, "I was utterly unacquainted with; consequently, to his serious enquiry had very little more to say, than that I would speak with you upon the subject, and ask whether it was your wish the promise should be continued or retracted. 'If Miss Delmington,' added I, 'consults *me* in this affair, I believe Mr. Eltham, you know what my advice to her will be. Should you, therefore, hear nothing further from me, I beg what I have now said may be looked upon as conclusive.' Upon this he arose, made me a very cavalier bow, and departed."

"And peace go with him!" cried Clarentine, sighing a weight of care off her breast, "I sincerely hope, that as *my* visitor, at least, I shall see him here no more."

She then thanked Mr. Lenham for the kindness with which he had undertaken so unpleasant a task, and taking leave of him for the night, retired to rest.

CHAPTER XIII.

SOMERSET, disdaining all artifice himself, frank, honourable, and noble-minded, suspected not that it was in human nature, unless sunk to the lowest depth of depravity, to dissemble by system, and deceive upon principle. Clear-sighted and discerning in perceiving merit, he was backward in discovering errors; and while it was possible to believe any action might have a *right* motive, obstinate in not imputing to it a *wrong* one. In courage, in understanding, in fortitude a man—in heart and disposition he was still a child. The blunt unpolished beings with whom he had been accustomed to associate, though they had infused into his character no portion of their roughness, had maintained in it and nourished all its genuine simplicity; and neither taught him the necessity of disguise, or the advantages of distrust. In favour of another, whom he wished to serve, he could be vigilant and observant; in all that related to himself he was credulous and unguarded. Compassionate, kind and friendly, whoever he saw unhappy he sought to relieve; whoever he believed deserving he sought to conciliate.

A character thus open, thus undesigning and liberal, it required far less address than Mrs. Hertford possessed, to work upon and influence. Quick in penetrating every thought of his honest heart, and skilful in tracing every avenue that led to its approach, she began her operations with a sagacity, a cool deliberate policy, that might have done credit to the noble principal whose agent she had condescended to become. It was not Somerset's affection she sought, or even expected to obtain; she knew too well which way the wishes of his soul pointed, to have any hopes of directing them towards herself; the artless and unconscious Clarentine—Clarentine whose congenial

mind so well accorded with his own, she was persuaded engrossed them wholly. Still, however, with such a man she had hopes of succeeding ; it was yet possible to interest his compassion, excite his pity, though she procured not his love ; and, as to his fortune only, his rank in life and independence she aspired, the feelings to which she might be indebted for his hand, were to her indifferent.

When at Portsmouth just before her marriage, she had first seen him, cold-hearted, and self-interested as she was, she had been unable to defend herself from experiencing an involuntary sentiment of admiration in his favour. The noble, graceful and unaffected dignity of his deportment ; the interesting expression of mingled animation and sweetness that characterised his countenance ; the gentleness of his manners ; the good-sense, good-humour and spirit of his conversation, it was impossible wholly to disregard. Even Mrs. Hertford felt the influence of qualities so amiable and so striking ; she felt it, however, without any diminution of her tranquillity ; and had Somerset, at that time dependent upon a mercenary father, offered himself to her at the very moment her partiality for him was the greatest, Mr. Hertford, wholly his own master, and said to be very affluent, would have been unhesitatingly preferred.

Yet anxious to reserve to herself the power, whenever Somerset returned, of renewing her acquaintance with him—pleased with the prospect, though now married, of being followed and attended by him, she most assiduously courted, (in remembrance of their near relationship to Mr. Lenham, Somerset's best and earliest friend,) the intimacy of Mrs. and Miss Barclay, during the whole time she remained in England. From them, wherever he might fix, she hoped to hear of him : but long before his first voyage was over, those hopes were for a while driven from her recollection by the alarming derangement of her hus-

band's affairs, and the melancholy necessity that drove them both to the continent.

Returning at the end of her long exile as penniless, as destitute, as when the infatuated Hertford first chose her for his ruin; disappointed in her ambitious projects of forming a second establishment abroad, and hopeless among those by whom she was too well known to form one in England, her thoughts again reverted to that Somerset, whom having seen only by accident she had hitherto seen without serious design; but whom now, persuaded he could have heard nothing of her former conduct, and assured she could only have excited in him sentiments that were favourable to her purpose, she determined to pursue, and whether still in expectation or already in absolute possession of his father's property, to captivate and conquer.

Her first eager enquiries after him were answered by Miss Barclay, with the welcome information that his arrival was hourly looked for, and his delay extremely wondered at. The same letter brought her intelligence that Clarentine Delmington, the orphan relation and favourite they had both heard him speak of so partially, was upon the point of taking up her future residence at his late tutor's, and meant to set out for Hampstead in the course of a very short time. She was then at Sidmouth; and Mrs. Hertford, as desirous to conciliate her favour, as she was from the same motives to cultivate that of the Barclays, sought with such diligent, though ineffectual assiduity to establish an intimacy with her, that, had suspicion been a weed of native growth in the mind of Clarentine, those assiduities alone would have been sufficient to have fed and cherished it. Innocent, however, and candid, little as she felt disposed to *love* Mrs. Hertford, she permitted not herself literally to distrust her till after the first conference she held concerning her with Eltham. Often had she since

endeavoured to erase that conference from her remembrance, particularly from the moment she found Somerset spoke favourably of her, and Mr. Lenham seemed to regard her with esteem: but the palpable artifices (palpable, at least, to the keen discriminating eye of jealousy) with which she had now during so many weeks seen her studying to recommend herself to the one, and to conceal her designs from the other, had at length so wholly conquered Clarentine's generous scruples, that she never beheld her without experiencing a sensation bordering upon disgust and horror.

Yet the success that had hitherto attended Mrs. Hertford's schemes had neither been very flattering to her vanity, nor very cheering to her hopes; her *soi disant* passion, though acknowledged with an *honest sincerity* for which she seemed to expect great credit, to its pretended object, whom she found impenetrable to mere hints and looks, had till now appeared to create in him only perplexity and uneasiness. He frankly confessed to her, and *his confession* was honest, that his heart was no longer his own; that he felt for her the truest admiration, the utmost gratitude and the liveliest friendship; but could never hope to repay the distinction with which she honoured him with any sentiments more fervent. Mrs. Hertford sighed, heard him with blushes and with tears; protested *his* happiness was so much dearer to her than her *own*, that could she but once see it secured she cared not what fate might await her; supplicated the continuance of his regard; claimed even his compassion, and ended by declaring she would never mention her unfortunate predilection to him more.

The next day, however, the day following, and every day she could speak to him apart, the same subject was revived, the same protestations poured forth, the same lamentations indulged! Somerset,

confounded, distressed, often wearied, sometimes answered her with the most respectful seriousness, at others, gently rallied her upon the unmerited condescension with which she treated him, and besought her for both their sakes to forbear renewing a conversation he grieved to say was so useless, and was certain must be so humiliating.

Mrs. Hertford upon these occasions had the art to conceal her consternation under the more touching semblance of sorrow and despair. Sometimes also she would talk to him openly of Clarentine ; insinuate that she had discovered *her* to be the object of his attachment, and with that species of guarded warmth so necessary in order to avoid all appearance of affectation, speak to him, as if involuntarily, of her beauty and her merit, and dwell with modest candour upon the many reasons she had to fear such a rival, without being able to discover one that could justify her in seeking, even if she had the power, to detach him from her.

Penetrated by this generosity, charmed from whatever quarter to hear the praises of one his heart so fondly cherished, Somerset, no longer languid, no longer absent, listened with an avidity and a delight to all she said upon the subject of Clarentine, that convinced her sagacious rival she had at length discovered a never-failing, though a borrowed magnet of lasting attraction. The hope, towards its close, of hearing that beloved name coupled with praise, made him patiently attend to all that in the early part of every conversation was irksome or embarrassing. His friendship, his concern for Mrs. Hertford redoubled ; and as Clarentine's reserve increased, the only consolation he seemed to find was in the sympathising pity of her gentle competitor.

It had once been Mrs. Hertford's plan to infuse into his mind a jealous distrust of Eltham ; that, however, as it was impossible to effect it without be-

ing often subject to seeing Eltham herself, she very soon relinquished all idea of, dreading no one's remarks or observations so much. Arch and significant as Eltham had often looked when witnessing her attentions to Somerset; thoughtless, flighty, and ungovernable as he was, he might, either designedly or by accident, reveal so many things it was her interest to keep secret, that she trembled every hour at the consequences of his perpetual visits. To check therefore, or, if possible, entirely to put an end to them, she described him to Somerset as a man, who, under the appearance of careless gaiety, concealed such licentious principles, such determined libertinism, that he was by no means a proper character to be admitted, where there was a young woman so inexperienced and attractive as Clarentine, upon such familiar and intimate terms. The very partiality she had, whilst at Sidmouth, suspected Clarentine to entertain for him, she now changed into, what she had since perceived it really was, embarrassment and apprehension; spoke of the uneasiness she was sure his presence often gave her with concern and pity, and urged Somerset to consult her upon the subject, and endeavour, as quietly as he could, to relieve her from such wearisome importunities.

Yet whilst thus anxious to deliver herself from Eltham as a spy upon her own actions, she deeply lamented the necessity she was under at the same time of removing him as a rival from Somerset. What could she now hope would prevent his seeking an explanation with Clarentine of her late coldness? and when that *was* explained, what could she hope would longer separate and disunite them?—These questions were difficult to resolve; Mrs. Hertford, however, fertile in expedients, *did* resolve them, and fixed upon a means of division she wisely concluded would be infallible.

Deeply versed in the art of investigating the characters of all those whom either her interest or her inclination induced her to court, and equally dexterous in knowing how to select from each the different qualities that could best be applied to her own service, it was not long before, in the delicate, disinterested, but of late, somewhat irritable mind of Clarentine, she discovered feelings upon which she might as successfully operate as upon the unsuspecting liberality of Somerset.

From Clarentine in person, then, she was determined the final crush of Somerset's future hopes should come; but as she had great reason to believe Eltham, finding himself banished from her presence upon any other terms, would, rather than lose her without a struggle, renew his assiduities upon the professed and honourable footing of an avowed pretender to her hand, she waited to begin her machinations till she saw whether her suspicions were realised, and whether Clarentine herself consented to accept him.

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. HERTFORD was too good a judge of the human heart to be often in danger of forming wrong conclusions. A week had scarcely elapsed since the dismission of Eltham, when one morning before Clarentine was up, the following letter from him, said to be brought by one of his grooms on horseback, was delivered to her.

MISS DELMINGTON.

“Barbarous, tyrannical and unpitying Clarentine! Tell me, was it by your stern decree I received so

insulting a prohibition? Gentle and merciful as you are to others, why ever thus inexorable to me? Oh! if I dared give utterance to half my indignation against you—against the cold-blooded, phlegmatic politicians who surround you, how madly I could rave and imprecate!

“With a woman’s form, with every attractive grace, every fascinating charm the loveliest woman can boast, you possess, unfeeling Clarentine, the callous, the impenetrable nature of a rock! Did you even take the trouble to seek a *pretence* for discarding me? Did you by one alleviating, one warning sentence prepare me for my doom? No; you stabbed me by surprise; chose the very moment when, most implicitly relying upon your once promised confidence and friendship, I thought myself secure and unendangered. What a time to select for such a blow! It came upon me with the sudden shock of an unexpected and resistless thunder-stroke; and but that a *woman* was its cause—that a *woman’s hand* directed it, scarce could it have appeared to me possible or real!

“You will tell me, perhaps—if indeed you think it worth while to attempt any extenuation of an act so inhuman, that it was not performed at your instigation: credulity itself, however, could give no faith to such an assurance. Who would, who *ought* to hazard so arbitrary a proceeding without your concurrence? Oh, Clarentine! I know you too well—I fear also I know too well the actual state of your relentless heart, to entertain any doubt of the ready participation you gave to the whole business.

“Would to heaven I had never seen you! never indulged the fatal propensity that led me to seek such dangerous society! From the hour I first knew you I may truly say I have never enjoyed a single day’s uninterrupted tranquillity. I am sick of such an existence: and after this one, this final effort to induce

you to soften its wretchedness, am determined, if it fails, to shun you during the remainder of my life !

“ As a friend, dearest Clarentine, you reject me ; as a lover you repulsed and scorned me ; as a protector you distrusted me : yet, fairest and best of human beings ! as a friend, a protector, a lover, all in one—as the partner of your future life, the grateful sharer of all your joys, the participator and soother of all your cares—as the man, in short, whom the most indissoluble ties have bound to you at the altar, the most fervent affection attached to you for ever, will you yet, oh gentlest Clarentine ! will you yet vouchsafe to receive me ?

“ Artless and generous as you are, I know that from suspense or delay I have nothing to apprehend : I can support neither : decide then upon my fate, but with the same mercy, as you will with frankness ; and in the happiest of men, and the most ardent of admirers, expect soon to behold your faithful and devoted,

“ **GEORGE ELTHAM.**”

The surprise, and sometimes even anger of Clarentine whilst reading this strange rhapsody, could only be equalled by the impatience she felt to answer it. Rising therefore immediately, and dressing herself in haste, she sat down, and without a moment’s deliberation wrote the following reply :

GEORGE ELTHAM, ESQ.

“ You were right, Sir, in doing me the justice to believe, that on a subject like the one upon which you have been pleased to address me, I should make it a point not to keep you an instant in suspense.

“ Accept then, Sir, my best thanks for the honour of your good opinion, but permit me, positively and for ever, to decline availing myself of it.

“ I have the honour to be, your grateful and obliged humble servant,

“ **CLARENTINE DELMINGTON.**”

Of this answer, though she kept no copy, it was not difficult on her descending to breakfast, and finding Mr. Lenham alone in the parlour, to give him a faithful account, at the same time that she shewed him the letter that had occasioned it.

“It is well,” said Mr. Lenham, returning it to her after he had read it, “it is well and happy for this young man he has, at length, met with a friend honest and independent enough to give him such a lesson. Naturally arrogant, and rendered still more so by the unlimited prosperity that has attended him through life, he seems to think the world was made to bow down before him. Pain or uneasiness, being almost a stranger to the very name of either, he supports with a proud impatience that irritates their smart, and gives fierceness rather than sorrow to his complaints. Whilst he could see you as often as he wished, talk to you of his passion, and apprehend no other impediments to his visits and importunities than your soft and gentle remonstrances, he was happy, because unrestrained. *Your* peace, *your* tranquillity, he thought not of; nor would this offer, he acknowledges it himself, ever have been made but to relieve his own inquietude.”

“I fancy,” said Clarentine smiling, “it was his *intention* to do me a great deal of unmerited honour; since, having once declared himself, he seems to think that a sufficient retribution for every offensive and passionate expression contained in the rest of his letter, and dreams not of making any further apology.”

Just then the door opened, and Mrs. and Miss Barclay entered to breakfast.

It was not long now before Mrs. Hertford, having obtained information of this whole transaction, begun her plan of operations.

Bringing her work one morning, as was frequently her practice, and establishing herself as soon as breakfast was over in Mr. Lenham’s parlour, she happen-

ed accidentally to be left alone with Clarentine, who, absent and thoughtful, was leaning in unusual inactivity over the back of a chair, opposite one of the windows.

After a short silence, during which Mrs. Hertford, discontinuing her employment, sat attentively observing her, she at length said, in a tone of kindness and concern—

“ What is the matter, my dear Miss Delmington? I have remarked for some time past with infinite regret, that the cheerfulness and animation which distinguished you when I first came hither, has totally disappeared, and given way to an air of melancholy painful to behold.”

Raising her eyes at the beginning of this speech, but without changing her attitude, Clarentine fixed them with the most steady and unmoved composure upon Mrs. Hertford’s face, and after a moment’s pause replied—

“ I expected not, madam, to have excited in your breast an interest so generous concerning me. You are extremely good, and I feel grateful for your enquiries, but must be excused answering them.”

She would then have quitted the room, but Mrs. Hertford, recovering from the momentary consternation a coldness so repulsive had occasioned, called her back as she was opening the door, and hastily said—

“ Allow me, Miss Delmington, if you are not particularly engaged this morning, to request the favour of five minutes conversation with you.”

Clarentine, still grave and frigid, yet evidently much surprised, slowly turned back, and drawing a chair towards the table, seated herself without speaking—

“ I know not, Miss Delmington,” said Mrs. Hertford, at length forcing herself to begin, “ whether the confidence with which I am about to trouble you

will appear deserving your attention, but the predicament in which I stand renders it necessary, that, to ensure my future peace of mind, I should now be explicit and unreserved with you."

"I am ready, madam," said Clarentine involuntarily dreading some latent artifice, "to hear all you may wish to communicate."

"You are very good, and give me courage to go on. I will frankly confess to you then Miss Dellington, that, the worth, the spirit, the generosity of our mutual friend, Captain Somerset (*Here Clarentine turned pale and almost started*) has made an impression npon my heart, too deep to be easily effaced, I knew him before my marriage, and even then, though I entertained not for him the same sentiments a longer acquaintance has brought on, thought him one of the best and most amiable of men. This partiality, however, this admiration, grateful to me as it is to indulge, I have for some time struggled anxiously to repress and conquer. A suspicion—may I tell you, my sweet friend, of what nature? a suspicion the most agonising and painful has haunted and pursued me, and till from your own lips I hear it refuted or confirmed, I can know neither rest or peace."

Too well foreseeing what was coming, Clarentine abruptly arose, and again moving towards the door, said—

"The suspicions, Madam, whatever they may be, which you entertain concerning me, I have no wish to hear explained: act, therefore, I intreat, as if they had never occurred to you, and accept my best wishes for the recovery of that peace they have been the means of interrupting."

She would then, with a calm dignity that almost over-awed even the intrepid Mrs. Hertford, have immediately left the room, but again supplicating her to return, she cried—

"O hear me, hear me, dear and generous Clarentine! My fate is in your hands: decide for me what it shall be, and keep me not longer in this torturing suspense! Tell me," added she, with quickness, "tell me, do you love Somerset?"

Clarentine's cheeks glowed with resentment, and her whole frame trembled with agitation as she disdainfully replied—

"I should have hoped, Madam, that the reserve which has hitherto subsisted between us would have precluded the *possibility* of your ever asking a question, which, even from a bosom friend or a sister, would be indelicate and unwarrantable."

"You will not answer me then? you will not so much as tell me whether by accepting Somerset's faith I wrong or—"

"Good God!" interrupted Clarentine, "do you believe, Madam, I would restrain you, I would withhold you? O no! If Mr. Somerset has offered himself to your acceptance, if it is his design to become yours, make him but as happy as he is deserving, and be assured I have no other wish."

"Excellent, noble creature!" exclaimed Mrs. Hertford with energy, "How do I honour the force of mind which can thus prompt you to renounce—"

Again Clarentine, though with less perturbation, interrupted her—"You have extremely mistaken my sentiments, Madam," said she, "I renounce nothing, for I have had no pretensions: I exert no *force of mind*, for I have had no weakness to conquer. Praise so humiliating, therefore, I must request to be spared."

"You amaze and you delight me!" cried Mrs. Hertford. "So wholly, indeed, had I mistaken you, that, attributing as well your late depression as your refusal of Mr. Eltham to the same cause, hoping to serve you, I ventured, however cautiously, to insinuate my suspicions to—Somerset himself."

With a start that was almost frantic, and a look at once wild and indignant, Clarentine tremulously repeated—

“To *Somerset*! you had the cruelty, the unfeminine, merciless cruelty to repeat such conjectures to *Somerset*! Oh speak,” added she with quickness, “tell me, did he *believe* you?”

“Captain *Somerset*,” replied Mrs. Hertford, “is the least vain of any man I know: he might have his doubts, but—”

“Oh heavens!” exclaimed Clarentine, sinking upon a chair, and covering her face with her handkerchief, in an agony of shame and mortification, “What is it you have done! why raise such insulting doubts? You have ruined, you have wilfully and irreparably injured me, and never more, if I can avoid it, will I see either *Somerset* or you!”

She was then, half distracted, hurrying out of the room, but stopping short at the door, and looking round—

“Tell him,” cried she, speaking with equal haste and emotion “tell him, at least, when you are married, and I am gone from this hateful place, how little you were justified in forming such suspicions! whatever love, whatever friendship I once felt for him is now all converted into horror!”

She then rushed out of the room.

Mrs. Hertford, assured her labour was now completed, and fearful, if Clarentine was seen in her present agitated state, of being suspected as its cause, soon after collected her work, and telling the maid at the door she had suddenly remembered some business that called her home, left her compliments to the ladies, and quitted the house.

The detestable insinuation she had so unfeelingly persuaded her unhappy victim had escaped her, it was nothing less than true she had ever dreamed of uttering; she knew too well the effect it would have

upon the enraptured Somerset to venture so dangerous and unnecessary an experiment, and perfectly convinced Clarentine's pride and indignation would be such as to lead her now most anxiously to shun every opportunity of being alone with him, she rested secure in the firm belief they would come to no explanation, but with increased reserve continue, one from consciousness, the other from mortification, to avoid all occasions of being together.

In this opinion she was completely justified by the event. Clarentine, whose passions either of sorrow or of anger, when they were once thoroughly roused, the keenness of her sensibility rendered it extremely difficult for her to subdue, had been so deeply hurt by the scene of the morning, and still felt herself so disturbed and irritated, that, when she received the usual summons to dinner, hearing Somerset, at whose very name she shuddered, was below, she pleaded indisposition in excuse for not going down.

In a few moments Mr. Lenham, ever kind and attentive, was at her door to enquire personally after her.

She went to him the instant she heard his voice, and affecting to speak with cheerfulness, made light of her complaint, intreated him to go back to the family, and to quiet his own apprehensions about her.

"I shall be well, dear Sir, in the evening," added she, forcing a smile, "and hope to be able to keep my engagement with Mrs. Denbigh, at whose house I promised to drink tea."

Somewhat re-assured by the composed and tranquil tone in which she compelled herself to answer him, Mr. Lenham, telling her her dinner should be immediately sent up, then left her, and returned to the parlour.

There had been a time when Somerset, open and undisguised, attached to her by every tie of gratitude and of love, would have permitted no consideration,

on hearing Clarentine was ill, to have prevented his flying with anxious precipitation to soothe, and if possible, mitigate her sufferings. That time was passed: it was long since, in the favourite retreat, he had taken such delight in decorating for her, Clarentine, by one encouraging look or smile, had granted him admittance. Checked by her coldness, which, though within a few days it had begun to abate, he still remembered with a mixture of sorrow and pride, all that animated sensibility with which he had formerly addressed her, with which he had spoken, not only *of* her, but *to* her, had been succeeded by a studied, distant civility of behaviour, equally well calculated to conceal his real sentiments from others, and from herself.

The first emotion and alarm, therefore, which the report of her indisposition involuntarily led him to betray, having subsided, upon hearing Mr. Lenham had seen, and found her better than he expected, during the rest of the day he carefully avoided mentioning her name, and affected, though with but little success, to discourse upon general subjects with the same ease and calmness as usual.

Meanwhile Clarentine, eager to get out of the reach, as well of Mr. Lenham's enquiries, as Somerset's dreaded presence, stole down the stairs as softly as she could when the hour was come at which she was accustomed to repair to Mrs. Denbigh's, and taking one of the maids with her, let herself out at the garden gate, to avoid being seen from the parlour windows, and proceeding lightly forward, soon reached that Lady's house.

It was no difficult task for Mrs. Denbigh, sagacious and penetrating as she was, to discover in the looks and voice of her young friend, the most manifest symptoms of perturbation and uneasiness. Clarentine's countenance was one of those, which, ingenuous and expressive, it was as easy to read as to

understand ; and though since the morning she had not shed one tear, heaved one sigh, or given way to any feelings but of indignation and resentment, her eyes looked so heavy, her heart seemed so oppressed, and she spoke with such unusual rapidity and incoherence, that, almost frightened to behold her, Mrs. Denbigh, after a short and anxious examination, earnestly called out—

“ My dear child, in the name of heaven ! what has happened to you ? Why do you look thus strange and thus disturbed ? ”

This eager enquiry shocked and surprised Clarentine so much, that staring at her at first without being able to answer it, she at length, in a hesitating and inarticulate voice, said—

“ Happened, my dear madam ?—Nothing—what should have happened ? ”

“ Something no less extraordinary than terrible, if I may believe your countenance,” replied Mrs. Denbigh. “ Have you had any letters ? any unexpected bad news ? ”

Too artless and candid long to elude such friendly urgency, Clarentine’s bursting heart now found a relief, no less seasonable than consolatory, in pouring out all its grief into the sympathising and indulgent bosom of Mrs. Denbigh. It was so long since she had pined, vainly pined, for some one in whom, unchecked by prudence or apprehension, she might securely confide, that soothed and melted by the gentleness and compassion that was shewn her, every irascible passion by which she had been torn subsided, and gave place to a gratitude the most fervent, and a sensibility the most unrestrained.

When her first emotion, however, had abated, and the tears she had so abundantly shed ceased to flow, Mrs. Denbigh taking her hand, and addressing her in a tone of mixed pleasantry and seriousness, said—

“ Tender and affectionate as I have long believed

you, my dearest Clarentine, I never suspected till this moment, that, to so much softness, your little heart united so much pride; you must curb it, my young friend, by every effort in your power, or greatly do I fear, that of the most benevolent and candid of human beings, it will teach you to become the most unjust and illiberal."

"Dearest Madam —" exclaimed Clarentine, with dismay.

"Nay, be not *very* seriously frightened," resumed Mrs. Denbigh, smiling; "what I said was more meant as a caution than a reproach. I would not hurt, I would not designedly offend you for the world, yet, my best Clarentine, is there not something a little petulant and hasty in the anger with which you permit yourself to speak of Mrs. Hertford? Allowing that her regard for Captain Somerset clashes with your own; that she has unadvisedly given him to understand more of your partiality in his favour than you could wish; still, however, I see not in either case any reason so severely to blame her. Let *your own* susceptibility be an apology for *hers*; and as for the disclosure she made to him, imprudent as it was, its *motives* at least could only be such as to do honour to her heart."

Clarentine, with a look of incredulity, and a smile of involuntary contempt, would here have interrupted her, but Mrs. Denbigh not allowing her time, somewhat gravely added —

"Young as you are, my dear Miss Delmington, these deep-rooted prejudices should not be cherished; since if such is *now* their force, when time adds experience to natural distrust, what will be their bitterness? Oh, let not then a tendency so unamiable sully the guileless and youthful simplicity of your character! Be not only virtuous and deserving in yourself, but cultivate with care that generous and

noble disposition, which should lead all whose own hearts are pure to believe well of others."

Clarentine could bear no more—

"Oh, Madam," cried she with earnestness, "what dreadful prepossession are you yourself conceiving against me! Am I, indeed, so lost to all sense of candour and justice as you describe? Do I appear so *very* illiberal, so *very* severe as to require such a reproof? Oh, believe me, the unfavourable opinion I have thus unguardedly betrayed of Mrs. Hertford is not the mere result of sudden resentment, or groundless conjecture! I intended inviolably to have kept secret all I had ever heard concerning her, but you now *compel* me in my own vindication to speak openly."

She then very circumstantially repeated every particular which had tended to infuse suspicion into her mind whilst at Sidmouth; spoke of the mysterious hints that Eltham had there dropped relating to her, the caution her earnest interrogations had drawn from him, the strange and significant looks with which he had always talked of her; and lastly, of the free and contemptuous style in which he had allowed himself personally to address her.

Mrs. Denbigh listened to all these circumstances with an air of surprise which plainly shewed, that had she depended less implicitly upon the veracity of the relator, she would have been tempted wholly to discredit them.

"*The greatest proof of art,*" it has been said, "*is to conceal art,*" and this Mrs. Hertford had so successfully accomplished, that far from having ever appeared in Mrs. Denbigh's eyes as a woman of design or contrivance, she had rather imposed herself upon her as one of volatility and thoughtlessness, who to a great deal of levity added quick parts, but neither depth enough to be capable of regular stratagem, or steadiness sufficient to apply her understanding

to purposes of utility. What the qualities of her heart might be, she had found no opportunity of seriously investigating: concluding them, however, to be rather benevolent than otherwise, from her constant readiness to oblige and her never-failing good-humour, she had always seen her without distrust, and conversed with her without reserve.

These being her sentiments, when Clarentine paused, Mrs. Denbigh frankly avowed them, adding.

“Upon the opinion of such a man as Mr. Eltham, careless and inconsiderate as without a doubt *he* is, I can consequently put little reliance. Mrs. Hertford, though now I believe she is seriously attached, once appeared to me, and formerly unquestionably, was, a giddy, vain coquette, fond of admiration, and delighting in new conquests: Mr. Eltham himself possessed much the same turn of mind; and these two, playing upon each other, with identical weapons, may very probably have had some little difference, the gentleman’s *proud stomach* knows not, even yet, how to digest. If he really thought *her* more to blame than *himself*, there was nothing dishonourable in his guardedly cautioning you against her; yet, from an adviser so ill qualified for the task, I would not, Miss Delmington, too readily imbibe injurious surmises.”

“Well, Madam,” cried Clarentine, “further than this, I will say no more upon the subject; it is equally impossible for me either to *forget* or not to *feel*; I am convinced, therefore, that as long as I remain in Mrs. Hertford’s vicinity, thinking of her as I *must* think, and suffering by her as I *must* suffer, I can enjoy no ease or comfort. Where I can go I know not, but from Mr. Lenham’s house, during the present posture of affairs, I am determined to remove!”

“Are you serious,” cried Mrs. Denbigh, with much astonishment. “I never was more so,” answered Clarentine firmly.

Mrs. Denbigh after this was silent a few minutes; but at length, addressing Clarentine again, and with the utmost kindness, she said—

“ If such, my dearest Miss Delmington, is your decided resolution, far from attempting to dissuade you from it, I will rather endeavour to make my own advantage of it. You say, that, at this moment you have fixed upon no particular place to repair to: I am myself, in a very short time, going to Bath: but as motives of friendship alone will lead me there, and I expect not to visit or be visited by more than one family in the place, its being so *early* or so *late* (I know not which to call it) in the season, is to me perfectly immaterial: will it be so, however, to *you*, my young friend, and can you voluntarily consent to shut yourself up, perhaps during six weeks, with so peevish an old moraliser? ”

“ Ah, Madam! ” cried the delighted Clarentine— “ if I could but flatter myself you were indeed serious in making me such a proposal! but it cannot be: it would render me *too* happy, and happiness and I seem destined to be great strangers! ”

Mrs. Denbigh, much affected by the purport of this speech, after assuring her in the most friendly terms she had never made an offer she so sincerely wished might be accepted, attempted to reanimate her courage and cheer her hopes.

“ It is too soon for you yet, my Clarentine, ” said she, “ to admit lasting sorrow or despondence into your breast. The world is all before you, a world into which you have hitherto scarcely taken more than a stolen glance: many, many are the comforts, the felicities I hope, it has still in reserve for you. Your own merit will make you friends; your independence ensure you respect; and the goodness and purity of your heart bestow upon you internal approbation. With such prospects, such health, such in-

nocence and youth, why, then, my dearest girl, why give way to this vain and thankless dejection!"

"Ah! believe me, Madam," answered Clarentine, the tears once more glistening in her eyes—"I have *not* given way to it! No day has now ever passed for many weeks that I have not strained every nerve to appear cheerful, even when my heart has been most oppressed; and though often wishing to indulge reflection, often wishing to be alone, I have yet always forced myself into occupation or society."

"In both," said Mrs. Denbigh, "you were wise and right: persevere, then, my gentle friend, in the same course, and doubt not but that, in a very short time, your virtuous efforts will be prosperous and successful."

She then reverted to the subject of their meditated journey, which she told her it had been her design to begin in about a week, but that, if it was her wish, and Mr. Lenham made no opposition to it, she would accelerate her departure without hesitation, and prepare every thing in order to set out in three days.

Clarentine was very grateful for this second offer, and very desirous, on finding it really put Mrs. Denbigh to no serious inconvenience, of accepting it. They mutually agreed, therefore, to be ready early on the following Tuesday: and then Clarentine, all thanks and acknowledgments, and Mrs. Denbigh all benevolent kindness, separated for the evening.

CHAPTER XV.

CLARENTINE hearing at the door, when she returned home, that Captain Somerset was already gone, immediately went into the parlour publicly to announce—wishing to avoid any private conversation with Mr. Lenham upon the subject—her new plan.

The surprise with which she was heard by every body, but particularly the anxious and stedfast look with which, whilst blushing and speaking very quick, she was surveyed the whole time by Mr. Lenham, embarrassed her extremely. She answered all their questions with the most tremulous agitation; seemed even afraid of raising her eyes, and sought with so much eagerness, but so little art, to change the conversation, that not only her venerable guardian, but Miss Barclay, who sat attentively examining her, was likewise filled with suspicion and amazement.

Her mother, however, neither so deeply interested as the one, or so distrustful as the other, spoke of the scheme, after her first unmeaning wonder was over, with her accustomed facetious unconcern.

“*Good wits jump, I’ve heard say,*” cried she, “it was but this very afternoon Captain Somerset talked of going a journey too; not so long a one though as yours, Miss Clary.”

Clarentine, who could not, now, hear the mere name of Somerset without confusion, trusted not her voice to make any enquiries; but in her own despite felt extremely anxious to learn whither, and for what purpose he was going. Mrs. Barclay went on—

“He’s obliged, he says, to set out for Windsor to-morrow, and doesn’t think he can be back in less than a week: so that, what with the loss of Mr. Eltham, your journey, Mrs. Denbigh’s, and his, we shall be left here quite solitary.”

“O, Miss Delmington has been in such *charming* spirits lately,” cried Miss Barclay, ironically, “that we shall certainly be terribly dull without her!”

“I am not conscious,” said Clarentine, vexed at this speech, and unusually eager to defend herself, “that I have been at all in worse spirits of late than common.”

“No!” exclaimed Miss Barclay—“Why, Lord,

you have looked, as my mother says, so like *a poor ha'porth of syrup* for above a month, that I could almost—

Clarentine, dreadfully afraid she would to her, as well as to Eltham, coarsely blunder out some rude insinuation concerning her being *in love*, now hastily interrupted her, and with a forced smile, said—

“ If I really *was* low-spirited, Miss Barclay, nothing would be so little likely to cure me as animadverting upon it.”

“ No, to be sure,” cried the mother, “ it only makes bad worse. For my part, when I’ve got the *blue devils*, I had as leave any body should beat me, as take notice of it.”

The conversation then, to Clarentine’s great relief, took a different turn, and nothing further was said concerning her journey that night.

Infinitely as her reason, and still more her pride, taught her to rejoice at her approaching departure, her heart, as the time drew near, sunk at the prospect of thus voluntarily banishing herself from Somerset.

“ Ah ! little did I imagine,” cried she, “ a few weeks since, that a separation like this, could ever have been planned and sought by *me* ! My whole soul recoils at the idea even now : and to go thus suddenly, thus coldly too—quit the place whilst he is absent—take no leave of him ! Good Heaven, is it *I* that can do all this ?—Is it *Somerset* I can thus part from ? Cruel, cruel Mrs. Hertford !—Why do you compel me to such a task ?—But for you I might still have remained here—still at times even have conversed with and heard him, as in former days, call me his *dear, his gentle Clarentine* !—*His Clarentine* ?—Oh, never, never shall *I* be his !”

It was on the night preceding her journey, that whilst, unfitted for general conversation, she was shut up in her own apartment, indulging these melancho-

ly reflections, some one, who by the gentleness of the sound she concluded to be Mr. Lenham, knocked unexpectedly at her door. She immediately arose from before the fire opposite which she had been sitting, and trying to assume a look of serenity, if not of cheerfulness, moved to the door, and opening it, was beginning, "My dear Sir, is it"—but drawing back the next minute, with an air of affright and consternation, walked hastily again to the chimney, followed by—Somerset.

Both, during a short, but to Clarentine most embarrassing interval, stood utterly silent. At length, Somerset, having shut the door, once more approached her, and with a look of hurry and anxiety said—

"Am I, Miss Delmington, to believe the strange report I have just heard? Are you, indeed, going from Hampstead?"

Clarentine, supporting herself with one hand against the table, and trembling as much from surprise at his unexpected appearance, as from confusion at the almost reproachful seriousness of his enquiry, answered in a low voice—"Yes, Sir."

"And did you mean, is it possible you could mean thus abruptly to set out without leaving one line to explain to me the motives of your departure, or, at least, to tell me when I might flatter myself you would return?"

Clarentine, dreadfully abashed, hung her head, and with difficulty repressed her tears, but attempted not to answer him.

"To speak of times *past*," resumed Somerset, after vainly waiting some minutes for a reply, "changed as they are, would to me be too painful; else would I ask Miss Delmington, whether the design she had *now* meditated, would *then* have appeared to her generous and friendly?—We quit not even a casual acquaintance without *some* preparation, some

previous information of our intention;—yet your brother, your friend, your Somerset, you could quit, and not even deign, concerned and amazed as you knew he must be on hearing of your departure, to leave him a verbal farewell!"

"Oh Heaven!" exclaimed Clarentine, overcome by this severe but just reproof, and throwing herself in a chair—"say no more, Mr. Somerset, I conjure you!—I am sorry—I am ashamed—I meant not—"

She could proceed no further, but bursting into tears, started up, and ran with precipitation into the adjoining room.

Her absence however, was of but short duration: the instant she was alone, reproaching herself for having flown from him so inconsiderately, she endeavoured to command her feelings, and return to him again with an apology somewhat more distinct, and a countenance somewhat more composed.

Almost hopeless of her granting him such an indulgence, Somerset, who, shocked and afflicted at the emotion he had caused, stood in an attitude of thoughtfulness and depression near the fire, hastily advanced to meet her as she entered, and in a softened voice, said—

"Can you forgive me, my dearest Miss Delmington, tell me, can you pardon the unlicensed freedom with which I permitted myself to address you?—I am grieved, you know not how deeply grieved, to have occasioned you one moment's uneasiness."

Clarentine required not this gentleness in order to feel pacified and appeased. Fully sensible how deservedly she must have appeared to merit his reproaches, they had not awakened in her mind one resentful thought, or excited in her any sentiments but of shame and regret. She therefore very readily accorded the pardon that was so humbly solicited, and then almost as humbly pleaded for her own.

"Oh!" cried Somerset, with earnestness, "speak

not such a word, I beseech you ; let the forgiveness be as wholly yours as the offence was mine."

Then drawing a chair next her, after she had again taken her seat, he added—

" I have but one apology to offer, Miss Delmington, for the force of the expressions I so much lament having used. The suddenness with which the intelligence of your intended journey was announced to me threw me off my guard, and bereft me of all reflection : my heart was full, I scarce knew what I said, and might have proceeded yet longer in the same strain, had not the tears I with so much cruelty drew from you, checked and recovered me to a sense of the impropriety I was committing."

" Well, well," said Clarentine, faintly smiling, " the storm is now blown over, and we will think of it no more."

" Ah, believe me," cried he, " I shall not the sooner cease to think of it with self-reproach for this unmerited gentleness and mercy!"

They were then for some time both silent. Clarentine, however, affecting a gaiety she did not feel, at length said—

" *Your* anger being past, Mr. Somerset, it is now *my* turn to reprove. Why, if *we* ought not even to quit a casual acquaintance without some preparation, did you set off so suddenly for Windsor, and leave me to hear of it only by accident?"

" Ah, dearest Miss Delmington," replied Somerset, in a tone of dejection,—" I had not the vanity to suppose *my* absence could be to you any other than a matter of utter insignificance : the case, with regard to what *I* felt for *your* departure, is different : I never did, nor ever *wish* to conceal, that in every thing which relates to you, I take the liveliest and most fervent interest!"

" Is it possible," thought Clarentine, extremely affected by this speech, " he could thus seriously re-

proach me for my indifference if he *knew or believed* I love him?"—This doubt gave her courage to look up, and with a sweetness and sensibility to which he had long been disused, she said—

"Why, Mr. Somerset, will you talk to me thus? Why believe me so unjust and ungrateful? Have I ever given you reason to suspect I really felt so little esteem and regard for you, as not to be sensibly hurt by any thing that on your part bore the appearance of slight or neglect?"

The wonder, doubt, and joy this speech occasioned Somerset, held him some minutes speechless and immovable. At length, however, recovering his voice, and eagerly snatching her hand, he pressed it with a look of gratitude and transport to his lips, and earnestly exclaimed—

"Ever dear, ever lovely and generous Clarentine! what relief to my heart has not this kindness—this un hoped for kindness given!—Oh, tell me," added he, after a short pause—"tell me—Why should you undertake this hateful journey?—Why must I, the first moment you have restored yourself to me again, and for so long, lose you?"

Clarentine, surprised, yet involuntarily softened by this tenderness, sighed deeply, but made no answer, and Somerset still detaining her hand, which indeed she had not courage to attempt drawing from him, thus went on—

"Could I divine, my beloved Clarentine, what passes in that gentle bosom, and penetrate its secret sorrows, with what earnest anxiety would I endeavour to alleviate them! You acknowledge," added he, "some regard, some esteem for me, but when, when will those sentiments animate again into confidence and affection? You cannot have a grief in which, mysterious as you are, I do not participate; say then sweetest Clarentine! tell me why that bitter sigh and these involuntary tears?"

Clarentine had no time, even if she had had words to answer him, for just then the voice of young Blandford was heard at the door, calling out—“Captain Somerset, Mrs. Hertford is below, and wants to speak with you.”

All Clarentine’s late pride of heart returned at these words; all that softness into which his own soothings and gentleness had melted her, disappeared, and snatching her hand abruptly from him, with glowing cheeks, and a look of haste and trepidation, she said—“Oh, go, go, Mr. Somerset! Why did you stay so long? Why suffer *me* to detain you?”

And then, without raising her eyes to his, or giving him time to stop her, with yet more speed than before, she rushed out of the closet into her own room, and locked the door after her.

In a few minutes she heard him, though slowly, go down stairs, after which all was silent, except that, at intervals, she fancied she could distinguish the murmur of voices in the parlour, as the maid (for it was now near supper-time) opened the door and passed backwards and forwards; what was said, however, it was impossible to discover, nor would her agitation have allowed her to listen even had she wished it. Disturbed and restless, she traversed her room with uneasy steps, sometimes softening at the recollection of Somerset’s late kindness; at others, indignantly shrinking either from the idea of sharing his divided heart with Mrs. Hertford, or being made solely the dupe of his dissembled affection.

That he wished her to believe he loved her, she could have no doubt; yet when she reflected upon his marked attention to another woman the whole time; upon the sort of public influence and power that woman seemed authorised to exercise over him; how to reconcile such a wish to his accustomed high sense of honour, she knew not. “Was it *pity* only, he designed to shew me?” cried she—“or does he

mean all these warm professions to pass merely for the effusions of *brotherly fondness*?—Why does his conduct so strangely militate against his language?—and why, when his looks are all tenderness, are his actions all duplicity? Is there either rectitude or principle in seeking to conciliate my affection after his own is gone? Oh Somerset, when shall I ever understand your inexplicable character! when know whether with justice to bestow upon you contempt or esteem!"

Whilst these thoughts were darting in rapid succession through her mind, the parlour door was again opened, and she heard Mrs. Hertford's voice in the passage. Desirous of assuring herself whether she was really going, Clarentine went back to her closet, and the moon being by this time risen, presently saw her attended by Somerset, who walked by her side, and her own servant who followed her at some distance, cross the little court before the house, and when she reached the gate that opened to the road, stop at it during a considerable interval, in apparently earnest conversation.

Clarentine's heart beat quick at this sight, and as if rooted to the spot, she stood mournfully observing them, till at length Mrs. Hertford, after shaking hands with Somerset, walked on with the servant, leaving him to go back alone to the house; this he did immediately, but as he advanced looking up at Clarentine's window, she hastily retreated, and soon after heard him shut the passage door, and return to the parlour.

The maid now came to let her know supper was ready; she declined going down, however, upon pretence she had not yet finished her packing, an excuse that in some measure was true, as she had still all her drawing materials to collect; but desired her to tell Mr. Lenham, that as she was to go very early in the morning, she should be extremely glad to speak

to him before he went to bed, either in his study or her own room ; Mrs. and Miss Barclay she meant to take leave of after they came up stairs, but Somerset she was determined if possible to avoid seeing again.

Accordingly, when at his usual hour Somerset, despairing of another interview, departed, Mr. Lenham hastened to her. His adieus were affectionate, and even in the present depressed state of her spirits, touching ; he carefully forbore, however, speaking upon any subject he thought likely to distress her, or asking one question concerning the motives of her journey ; but having remitted to her the quarterly payment that about this time was near becoming due, tenderly embraced and blessed her, and immediately retired.

The Barclays soon after both came to her likewise ; *their* parting compliments she found no difficulty in supporting with perfect composure ; they were short and blunt, though on the mother's part, at least, by no means unfriendly : and having staid with her a decent time, asked a great number of useless questions, and scarcely attended to one answer, they wished her good night, and walked out with the same unconcerned aspect they had entered.

Early the following morning, Mrs. Denbigh in a hired post-chaise was at the door, and Clarentine getting into it, they immediately proceeded forward, and sleeping one night upon the road, arrived the next evening at Bath.

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. DENBIGH and her fair companion having slept the first night of her arrival at the York Hotel,

sallied forth the next morning to secure lodgings as near as they could to the South Parade, where Mrs. Westbury, the friend who Mrs. Denbigh was purposely come to visit, resided. To these they immediately removed, and as soon as their early dinner was over, having previously sent a note to announce their intention, walked to that lady's house.

In the parlour which Clarentine was shewn into, whilst Mrs. Denbigh went up to her friend's room, sat a young man apparently about two-and-twenty years old, lounging back in his chair before the fire with a pamphlet in one hand and a tooth-pick (of which he seemed to be making furious use) in the other. His face and figure when he rose up and looked round, appeared to Clarentine, though both for a man, rather finical and diminutive, extremely regular and handsome, but the ridiculous affectation of negligence that accompanied every motion, and the fixed yet vacant stare with which, scarcely condescending to bow as she entered, he surveyed her, at first amazed, and afterwards embarrassed her so much, that, declining the chair which the servant had placed for her near the fire, she walked gravely to the window, and without speaking, stood before it with her back to him, pretending to be engaged in observing what was passing in the street.

This quiet indifference appeared to stimulate the young man's curiosity, and pique his vanity ; for in a very short time, kicking away the chair which stood between them in preference to taking the trouble of walking round it, he sauntered up to her with his hands in his coat pockets, and resting one shoulder against the window frame, and half yawning as he spoke, said in a languid, drawling voice—

“ Are you come to make any stay in this place, Ma'am ? ”

Clarentine, infinitely better pleased to enter into any sort of conversation than to be merely consi-

dered as an object to be stared at, very readily answered—

“ I believe, Sir, we shall be here about a month.”

“ You are a relation of Mrs. Denbigh’s, I presume, Ma’am ?”

“ No, Sir, I have not that happiness.”

“ Have you a very extensive acquaintance at Bath, Ma’am ?”

“ I never was here before, Sir.”

“ You come from London I think, Ma’am ? Is it not very thin just now ?”

“ No, Sir ; it appeared to me extremely crowded.”

“ At this time of the year London crowded ?—The public places filled ?”

“ Oh, as to the public places I know nothing about them, I spoke merely of the streets.”

“ The streets ?” repeated the coxcomb, a little contemptuously, “ And did those bright eyes vouchsafe to bestow a glance upon any of the vulgar objects in the streets ?”

“ My bright eyes,” replied Clarentine, determined to petrify him at once by the discovery of her insignificance, “ were so nearly upon a level with those objects, as I always was on foot when in London, that sometimes as well as my ears, they were extremely inconvenienced by them.”

The gentle youth, as she expected, looked utterly confounded at this disgraceful confession, and for some seconds remained profoundly silent ; at length, however, addressing her again, though with yet less ceremony than at first—

“ Mrs. Denbigh, I think, Ma’am,” said he, “ lives in a very confined circle when in town ? Do you reside with her ?”

“ No, Sir ; only for the present.”

“ Your usual residence is in the city then, perhaps ?”

Clarentine laughed, but again her only answer was

a simple negative; after which, walking very composedly to the fire, and sitting down, she took up the pamphlet he had been reading, and begun turning it over without seeming to recollect he was in the room.

Mrs. Denbigh now in a short time come down, and on seeing the young man, who, with a glass held to his eye, was still lolling against the window in a friendly and familiar voice, called out—

“ Well, John, how do you do?—Your mother has been telling me you have left college and are come to live entirely at home: I am glad to hear it on her account, for confined as she is, it must be a great pleasure to her to have you in the same house.”

John, appearing by no means delighted at the old-fashioned freedom of this address, made a cold bow, but did not speak.

Mrs. Denbigh continued—

“ I hope,” said she, sitting down by Clarentine, “ you have entertained this young lady very gallantly during my absence?”

John smiled a little superciliously, and still remained silent.

“ Why, friend,” cried Mrs. Denbigh, surveying him, at length, with some surprise, “ are you grown too fine to speak to an old acquaintance? You look immensely solemn.”

Then turning to Clarentine, who had thrown aside her book and sat internally enjoying poor John’s consternation—

“ What do these arch and comic eyes of yours mean?” cried she. “ Have you and our young student been falling out?”

“ O dear, not at all, madam!” answered Clarentine, unable any longer to refrain laughing. “ No two people were ever more peaceable than we have been: I don’t think we have spoken one word this last half hour!”

"That's being very peaceable indeed!" said Mrs. Denbigh, drily. "But pray John, how comes all this about? You were wont to be extremely assiduous *aupres des dames*: is not that any longer the fashion?"

"Dear Ma'am," cried he, simpering and looking extremely silly, "why ask *me* such a question? Nobody cares less about fashions than I do." Then putting up his glass and moving indolently towards the door, "I'll go and see," added he, "whether my mother is coming down."

"No, don't trouble yourself," cried Mrs. Denbigh, "Miss Delmington and I are to drink tea in her dressing-room, and when she is ready she will send us word."

"Miss Delmington!" repeated the young man, with a look of surprise, "is that Lady's name Delmington?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Denbigh, "did you ever hear it before?"

"O, very often; I had the pleasure of being extremely well acquainted at Oxford with a young Baronet of that name—Sir Edgar Delmington. Pray, Ma'am," to Clarentine, "is he any relation of yours?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Your brother?"

"No, Sir—my cousin."

Assuming an air of infinitely more politeness than he had yet worn, (though her *London walks* still choked him a little) he now said—

"Upon my word, Ma'am, I am extremely happy to have had the honour of seeing you. I hope Sir Edgar is very well?—Is he in town?"

"He is in Devonshire, I believe, Sir,"

"How could you suppose," cried Mrs. Denbigh, "that an acquaintance of *yours*, Mr. Westbury, a Baronet, would disgrace himself (not being in par-

liament) by appearing in London before the birth-day?"

Just then, very fortunately, for Mr. Westbury was extremely at a loss what to say, the door opened, and they were all summoned to the dressing-room.

In the mother of this trivial young man, Clarentine found a woman, who, though an habitual valetudinarian, feeble and infirm, was yet pleasing, sensible, and well-bred. She had been the tried and approved friend of Mrs. Denbigh for more than thirty-years; was blessed with an excellent temper and many estimable virtues. To these recommendations, however, she unfortunately added one predominant foible, which in conversation, at least, often obscured them so much, that it required some candour and yet more judgment to discriminate her real merit though so thick a mist. She was, what has often been described but can never be too often held up to derision, a female pedant, a female politician, a smatterer in philosophy, a perpetual controvertist! In her youth she had been, though not a decided beauty, an exceeding pretty woman, which advantage, reinforced by the powerful addition of gold, had gained her many admirers, much delicate flattery, and a great deal of obsequious attention. Time advanced, wrinkles appeared, and lovers disappeared!—The love, Mrs. Westbury found it no difficult matter to dispense with; but the adulation, the general homage, the constant deference—how was she to dispense with these? At once to sink into insignificance, after having been so long held up as an object of universal admiration, was not to be borne! Mrs. Westbury, therefore, in the failure of youth and beauty, had recourse to study—set up for a female critic, and though on a different score, was still by many fools admired, and by many wise men, for the sake of peace, applauded.

With the acuteness and excellent understanding which Mrs. Denbigh possessed, it is not to be imagined she was the last to discover all these little failings. Kind-hearted, however, and affectionate, such errors in a friend who, to counterbalance them, had so many good qualities, she easily pardoned, and endeavoured as much as possible either wholly to overlook, or unmoved to smile at. Upon follies utterly unmixed with malignancy, yet too deeply rooted by age to be eradicated, she thought it as ungenerous to exercise severity, as it was hopeless to attempt experimental reform.

Learned dissertations or political arguments apart, Mrs. Westbury could be equally rational and entertaining; and in that light, during the whole evening, did she appear to her youthful visitor. Books were sometimes talked of, but only such as she imagined were within Clarentine's reach, in which number she justly concluded that poems, moral essays, and history might be comprised. Upon *Revolutions*, *Government*, &c. &c. fortunately for her fair auditor, she wholly forbore touching, well knowing that Mrs. Denbigh (though far more ably qualified to discourse upon such subjects than herself) had an insuperable aversion to them, and wisely suspecting, that with the modest Clarentine it might be the same.

Young Westbury meanwhile had, as soon as any thing like regular conversation began, disappeared, leaving Clarentine infinitely more disgusted by the species of servility he had displayed subsequent to his discovery of her relationship to a *Baronet*, than she had by any means thought it worth her while to be by all his previous impertinence.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CLARENTINE had been about three days at Bath, when from her friend Sophia, to whom she had written before she left Hampstead to inform her of her intended journey, she received the following letter.

Delmington-House, Dec.

MISS DELMINGTON—"Why, what an unconscionable, merciless little monopolist of human hearts you are, Clarentine! A few days since arrived at Welwyn park, with as love-lorn and almost as wo-begone a face as ever my poor brother Edgar had, your *second cast-off*, George Eltham Esq.—The man really made me give a *nervous start* (I am *very nervous*, you know) the instant I beheld him; nor for a long while, guess, try, puzzle and perplex myself as I would, could I possibly make out what was the matter with him. "Surely, thought I, that solemn phiz must portend something direful and strange! Whom have I seen that ever looked at all like him? Why, Edgar. And why did Edgar look like him? Because he was *crossed in love*. Ergo, *this* man must be crossed in love! Now, the next thing is to find out *who* has done this wicked deed." Accordingly, I set about this arduous undertaking (suspecting *you* a little, all the time); and after four failures, four days shuffling and evasion on *his* part, and four days fruitless examination and cross-examination on *mine*, at length drew or rather *dragged* from him his horrifying secret.

"You shall hear, for your edification and instruction in a similar case, how I finally succeeded.

"I went yesterday morning (I should certainly not have gone but for the above mentioned purpose, for the day was piercing cold,) to call upon Lady Julia, who is now at her father's. Never having lived in the great world, you know, I am as regardless of

all ceremony as the wild inhabitant of an African desert:—O, you may truly call *me* an unadulterated *Child of Nature!* Well, in at the little park gate, to which she gave us a key last year, I went (marching up the solemn avenue is my aversion), and from thence making the best of my way, through the glass door in the breakfast room, entered the house. All was profoundly silent in that quarter of the mansion; and so, after taking an inventory of the many supernumerary moveables I beheld—such as a fierce cocked-hat of Mr. Eltham's upon one chair; a muff and cloak of Lady Julia's upon another; an odious squalling parrot, I presume, of her Ladyship's likewise; a stately gold-headed cane of my Lord's, &c. &c.—I moved on, and without any interruption safely reached the dressing-room.

“I entered—and lo! the first object I beheld was Mr. Eltham in person, alone and reading. “Times are dismally changed;” thought I, “this poor man never used to sit thus quietly dosing over a book!”

“I curtsied with my accustomed profundity—he bowed with unaccustomed gravity; after which we both sat down.—

“A very cold day, Sir,” said I.

“Yes, extremely so,” answered he.

“Have you been out this morning?”

“A little way with Lady Julia, but she found the wind high, and turned back in less than ten minutes.”

“Upon this I started up, and flying to the glass, “Ah, true,” cried I, “the wind is high, and ought to have given me a bright colour; and so it has, I protest! Look at me, Mr. Eltham, I really am extremely like my cousin Clarentine to day; don't you think so?”

“Mr. Eltham forced a smile, and said, “why should you not be as well contented to look like *yourself?*”

“*Belle demande!*” cried I “Why because, you

that Paul has the greatest
moral worth ever
produced. 107

know, Clarentine has always been reckoned the beauty of the family ; nay, if I am not mistaken, *you* thought her so as well as every body else. Pray," added I, delighted to observe he seemed to sit uneasy, and *fidgetted* upon his chair--" pray, for I forget what you said about it, have you seen her very lately?"

" No," answered he, rising and strolling to the window with an air of affected indifference, " not very lately."

" Umph!"—thought I—" that's a *fib*, I have no doubt!"

" I said nothing more, however, but moving to the piano forte, stood turning over some of the music that lay scattered upon it, and among the rest, spying the stale old song—

" Why so pale and wan, fond lover?"

sat down to the instrument, and with all the expression I could give it, began playing and singing it, I may almost say *at* him, rather than *to* him.

" Very indecorous, Clarentine, was it not?

" The poor man could not stand this—but approaching me with a look somewhat angry and tremendous—" Miss Sophia," cried he—(he seems to hate the name of Delmington, and never utters it when he can avoid it), " these significant looks, your choice of this song, the strange and repeated questions you have asked me—what do they all mean? What is it you wish me to understand by them?"

" I thought it best to be honest with him at once, and therefore answered very calmly—" Only that I am extremely curious, Mr. Eltham, and have an earnest desire to know, when the case becomes my own, how it will be most proper and well-bred to discard an unsuccessful lover. I am sure *you* can give me this information, for your whole aspect tells that

you *have* been discarded, and by one, I suspect, who would do it in the civilest way in the world—Miss Clarentine Delmington."

"Civil!" repeated he, turning from me and walking about the room in great agitation, "Civil!—No; she was imperious, inhuman!"

"So far, so good," again thought I—"my conjectures were right, I find!"

"Then assuming an air of mingled surprise and concern, "Clarentine deserve such an imputation?" cried I—"Impossible! She is gentleness and goodness itself, and I am persuaded, Mr. Eltham, to *you* could never behave with impropriety."

"Is this astonishment real or affected?" cried he, sitting down near the instrument and looking distrustfully at me—"Has she not written to you? Has she not exulted in her scorn, her haughtiness, her inflexibility!"

"You amaze me!" cried I, "what should lead you to entertain such an opinion? She has written to me, it is true, and to my mother also; but not one word is there in *my* letter, at least, that in the most distant degree relates to you."

"This seemed to wound his pride more than all the rest. Again he arose, and renewing his *quarter-deck walk*, said in a hurried, indignant manner, "I believe, indeed, I need have been under no apprehension that she would take the trouble to record her cruelty! she murders unconsciously—and when she has stabbed the deepest, turns from her victim with the cool unconcern!"

"Of a *butcher*!"—interrupted I—"was not that what you meant?"

"Angry as he was, he seemed half tempted to smile; but repressing the unseemly propensity, and moving towards the door.—"I will leave you, Madam," cried he, "raillery upon this subject is more than I can bear!" and was then actually going; but

calling him back, and apologising very seriously for my unseasonable flippancy, I at length softened him, and he ended (by no means sorry, I believe, to have an auditor so willing to listen to him) by recounting to me his whole disastrous story.

“ I wish, dear Clarentine, you could have seen with what a half-pitying, half-laughing countenance I heard him. It was impossible to attend to his impassioned, and sometimes almost frantic exclamations and complaints, without being ready to expire: I contrived, however, to conceal my risibility upon the whole, pretty well; but I sincerely hope I shall never sit in such misery again.

“ I believe we were together almost half an hour after he had disburdened his *o'er-fraught heart*, before Lady Julia came to us. Never was relief more welcome! for though his history was concluded, his ravings still continued, and the whole expression of his countenance often assumed such a fierce and *savage* cast, that seriously speaking, I was more than once so heartily frightened, I would have given the world to have been out of the room!

“ Lady Julia, who had been sitting with her father in the library, and did not know I was in the house till she saw me, pressed me extremely to stay dinner, but that, not having leave given me, I declined. After sitting with her therefore as long as I dared, I went home escorted by Mr. Eltham, who spent the remainder of the day with us.

“ We parted at night exceeding good friends; but if he concludes the horrible fright he put me into is to pass unrevenged, he is wonderfully mistaken! It was impossible to do any thing yesterday but appear to pity him; the next time he comes, however, he will find me a little less compassionate. Are people to be put into fear of their lives by every impatient mortified lover, who wears willow instead of myrtle?

" I wanted extremely to make him talk to me, as we were walking home, of Mr. Somerset, but could not manage it at all. Why this shyness? Does he apprehend in him a rival? Clear up this point to me, dear girl, I intreat; and write to me a detailed account of every wise man or every fool you see, every place you go to, every creature you visit, every pleasure or disappointment you meet with !

" Adieu, my own Clarentine. Your poor deserted little Emma, who is the only one in the house, by the way, that knows of my having written this mad letter, desires her tenderest love to you, and a thousand grateful thanks for the charming books you so kindly sent her.

" Adieu again,

" SOPHIA DELMINGTON."

The effect this letter had upon Clarentine was much the same with that Mr. Eltham's own conduct had always had: it made her congratulate herself upon the fortunate independence which had given her the power of rejecting him; and led her very naturally to conclude a passion so indignant and so resentful was not of a nature to be very lasting in itself, or very tender to its object.

" Such a man," cried she, " fiery and impetuous—always exacting implicit submission to his own will, or bursting out even with those he ought either to respect on account of their age or sex, into transports of irrational fury—Oh, such a man was not destined to make me happy! Far, far different is my idea of the disposition of him I would choose as a partner through life. To all the spirit and gallantry of youth and courage, I would join humanity and gentleness; to an open intelligent countenance, an expression of benevolence and sensibility; to strong natural parts, the most unpresuming diffidence; and to a temper at

once generous and placable, a cheerful gaiety equally distinct from turbulence or sadness. Ah ! where," added she, " can such an object be found ? or where, when found, is the reasonable hope that should lead me to expect it will ever be my lot to be so allied ? There is, there can be upon earth but one such character, and he who possesses it, is, I doubt not, lost to me forever !"

Thus indulging the fond admiration and plaintive regret she had so often determined to suppress, Clarentine, who had hoped so much from time and change of scene, as the hours, days and weeks passed away, found that the depression of her spirits rather augmented than decreased, and the sadness of her heart took from her all power of exertion and all capacity of enjoyment. No longer surrounded by observers whom she feared, those quick and irritable feelings which had, of late, upon the slightest occasion, alarmed her pride and awakened her distrust, were succeeded by a quiet dejection, a settled but unmurmuring gentle sorrow, that penetrated Mrs. Denbigh with compassion. She saw that her young friend, pale, languid and oppressed, lost her health as well as her animation, and that although too rational to decline partaking in the amusements that were proposed to her, she yet found no real amusement or relief in any thing. The discovery gave her pain in proportion to the warmth and sincerity of the truly maternal regard she had conceived for her ; and determining, if possible, to counteract this dangerous turn of mind, she seized the first opportunity that presented itself of attempting by friendly admonitions and remonstrances to reason her into greater firmness.

" My Clarentine," said she, one morning as they were sitting at breakfast, " I have a proposal to make to you : this place, contrary to my expectations, seems to disagree with you so much, that I cannot

bear to be the occasion of prolonging your stay at it ; and therefore next week we will go back to town."

" Dear Madam," cried Clarentine, alarmed at the very mention of such a scheme, " why so ? Happy or gay, I expect not to be any where ; but here, at least, I am tranquil ; and as for my health, that can derive nothing but benefit from the air and situation."

" But how is it then," resumed Mrs. Denbigh, " that acknowledging thus readily the value of tranquillity, you yet suffer yourself to droop and pine with so little fortitude and so little strength of mind ? Clarentine, such weakness is unworthy of you ? it renders useless every acquirement you possess, and every good quality with which you are gifted ; degenerates what was once female softness, blended with spirit and sound sense, into inertion and supineness ; and will, I fear, in time degrade you into a mere languishing enervated *love-sick girl* ? Is your case, my young friend, a *new* one ? Oh no !—How many notable and contented old women there now are, attending duly to the domestic occupations of their household, scolding their maids, whipping their children, snarling at their husbands, and sitting in judgment upon their neighbours, who once, like you, were sunk in listlessness and apathy, and thought no pleasure equal to that of elegantly indulging their romantic despondence !"

" Ah, my dear Madam," cried Clarentine, who had listened to this speech with alternate blushes and smiles, " is mine an affection that deserves thus to be severely censured ? You well know it has not been the mere work of an idle imagination, seeking anxiously, yet selecting unworthily, some object of fancied perfection on whom to bestow unqualified and enthusiastic admiration : on the contrary, it is a sentiment that stole upon me gradually and imperceptibly ; which, though never intentionally cherished,

grew with my growth and strengthened with my strength. I was yet a mere child, helpless and dependent, when William Somerset, at an age when most boys fly from a nursery with disdain and horror, was my watchful friend and only companion : we parted long e'er I knew the value of such an associate, but not before, in remembrance of his invincible kindness, my heart was attached to him with the warmest gratitude. In my second asylum I found *another* friend, and companions whom I soon learnt to love with nearly equal tenderness : here, however, the affection I met with in return, though cordial, I believe, and sincere, had neither the stability, the gentleness, or the indulgence of that I had been used to from him. Edgar, who was the one at that time oftenest with me, was frequently unjust and petulant ; a moment of unintentional neglect, a childish or hasty reproach, would irritate and offend him so deeply, that perhaps during a whole day he would neither speak to me, nor listen to any excuse ; his sisters, engrossed by other objects, of course, had no leisure to bestow upon me that degree of attention to which, unfortunately, I had been accustomed ; so that often in the midst of playfellows of my own age, in the midst of society and cheerfulness, I felt desolate and unhappy."

"A fatal tendency to encourage causeless repinings, seems to have been your bane through life," said Mrs. Denbigh, here interrupting her—"but go on with your little history, and forgive this abrupt comment."

"Rather call it my *apology*," said Clarentine, smiling, "I have not much more, however, to add ; nor ought the recapitulation of our own feelings to take up a great deal of time. Is there one amongst us, who, minutely describing every past emotion of their mind, could not make up, as I have done, a tedious dissertation upon nothing?"

"Well, well, go on, I tell you," cried Mrs. Denbigh, with a sort of impatient pleasantry, "go on, and whatever compliments I can spare shall come afterwards."

Clarentine laughed at this speech, and thus continued—

"Several years now passed, during which, except by letter, my friendly William and I had no intercourse. At length he came down into Devonshire upon a visit in our neighbourhood, and stopped, he said, at his *father's*, but I doubt not at his *own* instigation, to visit and enquire after his former little inmate. An accident not worth relating now, prevented my seeing him till after he had quitted the house ; he found me fainting and senseless upon the road as he was driving through the village, and in that condition carried me back in his carriage to Delmington House. Never, oh, never can I forget, child as I yet was, the look of tenderness and solicitude with which, when recovering, I beheld him standing motionless before me ! It was a look that penetrated my very soul, and would alone have taught me to love him, had not his previous behaviour already disposed and his subsequent conduct *compelled* me to it ! Again, however, we parted, but not for the length of time we had been separated before ; he returned to us more kind, more animated, more generously interested in all that related to me than I had even dared hope to find him, and during the two days he staid, treated me with a conciliating sweetness, a *more* than fraternal partiality, that left upon me, at his departure, a melancholy and regret I scarce knew how to conquer."

"Well," cried Mrs. Denbigh, again breaking in upon Clarentine's little narrative, "all this, I confess, was flattering and insinuating ; but, my dearest girl, have you not in Sir Edgar Delmington, in a young man whose passions must necessarily be so much

more ungovernable than your own, an example of fortitude and self-command that ought to stimulate you to emulation? *He* too, I have been told, knew you from your infancy, was brought up in the same house with you, and cherished for years the most fervent and animated affection for you. Duty, reason, and honour, however, enabled him to conquer this early and habitual prepossession: and in a case exactly parallel to your own, made of him, at once, a hero and a philosopher! Are *your* feelings, though less tumultuous, more insurmountable? Let it not be thought! Exert your courage, dissipate your mind, try every experiment that the ingenuity of woman can devise, to prove that an opinion so humiliating is groundless and erroneous!"

"The counsel," said Clarentine sighing, "is good, and I will endeavour—I *have* endeavoured, always to act as if in pursuance of its dictates: yet, my dearest Madam, similar as the two cases may appear, there is, however, a wide difference between the part that Edgar had to perform, and that which is now assigned to me. From the first moment he discovered to me his unauthorised partiality, I dealt openly and frankly with him; and readily, gladly as I would have promised him my friendship, denied him all claim to my love. Have I been treated with equal candour? Oh no! Such ungenerous, unremitting pains have been taken to lead me into a belief I was beloved, that, till my own observation, and yet more convincingly the explicit avowal of Mrs. Hertford, told me I deceived myself, every action, every look, seemed calculated to infuse into me a positive certainty of Somerset's attachment! Ah! wonder not then, that whilst entertaining so flattering an illusion, the high opinion I had of his honour and integrity lulled all vigilance to sleep, and left me neither power or inclination to resist the grateful affection I felt for him! I beheld him as a man who from

infancy had loved me—who seemed to have no desire so earnest as that of promoting my happiness—as him, in short, by whom it was finally destined to be assured!"

At that moment their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Denbigh's servant who brought Clarentine a letter; it came by the post, and was directed in Somerset's hand. She received it with a degree of agitation she scarce knew how to conceal; and laying it down upon the table by her, as soon as they were again left by themselves, said to Mrs. Denbigh—

"The writing is Somerset's—I almost fear to open it!"

"Give it me then," said that lady, smiling—"and if it is *very* treacherous and *very* tender, I will burn it without suffering you to read it."

Clarentine hesitated a moment, and then holding it out to her, "Ah! why does he write to me at all?" cried she: "There—take it, dear madam, and if I can help it, I will not even *wish* to know its contents."

"Come, come," cried Mrs. Denbigh, "I begin to have some hopes of you! This is the most rational thing you have done yet." She then opened the letter, and began reading to herself; while Clarentine, with her eyes fixed upon her face, sat earnestly observing her, by turns reproaching and applauding herself for the facility with which she had resigned a privilege which would once have been so precious to her.

When Mrs. Denbigh had ceased reading, "Here, my dear," said she, "take back your letter; it contains a request which no one but yourself can answer."

"A request!" repeated Clarentine, starting and blushing; "To *me*! Of what nature? What request?"

"Nay, nay, my love," resumed Mrs. Denbigh very calmly, "don't put yourself into such tremors; the favour he asks is as trifling as his style is simple and proper; see what he says yourself, therefore."

Clarentine held out an unsteady hand for the letter, and read as follows :

MISS DELMINGTON.

Clifford-street, December.

“ I am unwilling to suppose, my dearest Miss Delmington, that our parting, though abrupt, was therefore unfriendly ; and as you prohibited not my writing, take the liberty to address to you a little petition it will give me the utmost pleasure to hear you receive with indulgence.

“ Since you left town I have been down a few days in Northamptonshire, and purpose going thither again during Christmas week with a party of friends, two of whom mean afterwards to spend a short time at Bath. I dare not presume to accompany them ! but if, when they have left me, I should direct my wandering course to Delmington House, would you, my gentle friend, whilst I am there, favour me with a letter of introduction to your amiable Madame d’Arzele ? I have the most earnest desire to see and become acquainted with her ; and under whose auspices could I hope for a more indulgent reception, than under those of her young and lovely benefactress ?

“ You appeared at your departure indisposed, dispirited, and, I fear, unhappy : write to me I beseech you ; tell me you are better ; that the air of Bath agrees with you ; and that, although compelled to suffer by your absence, I have nothing to apprehend for your health !

“ Present my best respects to Mrs. Denbigh : she is my friend, and I hope will assist in determining you to grant my request.

“ Adieu, and may all happiness attend you !

“ WILLIAM SOMERSET.”

The extreme surprise with which Clarentine perused this letter kept her silent some minutes after she had concluded it; at length, however, pointing to these words, *I purpose going thither again during Christmas week*, she said, with a look of incredulity, "Do you believe, Madam, he has really such an intention? Do you believe he will again, and for so long, quit Mrs. Hertford?"

"I always believed every thing that a man of honour told me," answered Mrs. Denbigh, "except, indeed, his vows of perpetual constancy! What such repeated journeyings can mean, however, I acknowledge it is beyond my power of comprehension to find out."

"Thus," cried Clarentine, sighing, "has he ever been—mysterious and unfathomable. Oh! that this painful suspense were over! that at length, he was actually married, and all doubt of his attachment for ever at an end!"

"A decisive way, it must be owned, of terminating suspense!" cried Mrs. Denbigh: "I did not think, Clarentine, you had resolution to form so sensible a wish. But let me hear what you design to do concerning the letter he requests you to write for him. Shall you send it?"

"Undoubtedly; and the more readily, as I know it will give infinite pleasure to my excellent Madame d'Arzele to see him. On his first arrival he was the constant theme of all my letters to her, and she has often expressed great concern at the idea it was so unlikely she should ever be acquainted with him."

Mrs. Denbigh now arose, and asked her whether she would accompany her on a morning visit to Mrs. Westbury.

"No, my dear Madam, not to-day, if you please: my mind is unusually occupied and perplexed, and just now I can think of nothing but this strange letter."

"Well then," said Mrs. Denbigh, "I will leave you, for the present, to your own contemplations; but in the evening I am determined you shall go to the assembly—and what is more," added she, "you shall dance with your little favourite, Johnny Westbury, if he will have you!"

Clarentine, not believing this speech had any real meaning, made no opposition to the plan, and soon after Mrs. Denbigh left her.

CHAPTER XIX.

AT dinner, when Mrs. Denbigh returned—"Well, Clarentine," cried she, "I have made a party for you to-night, and Johnny has *half* promised, provided a certain Hon. Miss Somebody, sister to a certain Lord Somebody, does not make her appearance in the ball-room till after the two first dances are over, he will do himself the honour to go down them with you."

"He is really too obliging!" said Clarentine, laughing; "but, dear Madam, is it true you have made this party?"

"Yes, perfectly true. I met Mrs. and Miss Manners at Mrs. Westbury's, and they have promised to call for you at the proper hour. Before you go, however, I desire I may see you with all your plumes and decorations: I am a prodigious judge of modern dress you know, and therefore, lest Johnny should criticise your taste, come and consult mine previous to his seeing you."

"I am afraid," said Clarentine, smiling, "a dress so simple as that I shall wear will neither be worth your attention, Madam, or Mr. Westbury's."

"Well, no matter how simple it is, if, according to Johnny's opinion, it is but *fashionable*: he would expire at the idea of dancing with you, if you had

one grain too little or too much powder in your hair, or half a straw's-breadth too long or too short a waist!"

"I will endeavour then," said Clarentine, "to be as correct in all these matters as I can; but really I know so little of the business of a toilet that I am afraid I shall succeed very ill at last."

"In that case," cried Mrs. Denbigh, "I don't know what people can do better than persuade themselves to like you for your originality. A young woman in these days, who is a novice in the science of dress, is so extraordinary a creature, that she ought, I think, to be admired as a curiosity."

They then separated, and Clarentine went to prepare for the evening.

At the hour appointed the two ladies, who had been engaged to go with her, and whom she had several times seen before at Mrs. Westbury's, called for her in their own carriage, and they all proceeded to the assembly-room.

This was the first evening that Clarentine had ever been in public, except, since she had been at Bath, once or twice with Mrs. Denbigh at the play. The confusion she expected, however, to experience, the extreme fulness of the place effectually prevented: the last week had brought down an incredible number of people, all of whom appeared to be concentrated in that one spot: consequently, no particular party could be more conspicuous than another, but each seemed to have met there for the sole purpose of being crowded and incommoded.

"Oh, how much preferable," thought Clarentine, "were our little social and cheerful balls at Delmington, to this dull, yet bustling scene!"

Soon after a tall, fine young man, whose countenance was animated and pleasing, and who had for some time been engaged in observing them as they slowly advanced, contrived to approach Miss Manners, who had hold of Clarentine's arm, and said to

her in a low voice, yet loud enough to be overheard, "will you introduce me, Louisa?"

"Yes, certainly :"—then turning to Clarentine—"allow me, my dear Miss Delmington," added she, "to present my brother to you."—

Clarentine curtsied, and Mr. Manners very politely addressing her, said—"I fear, Miss Delmington, that any application to you for the honour of your hand this evening, would now come too late: you are probably engaged already?"

"Indeed," replied Clarentine, half-laughing, "I scarcely know whether I am or not."

"And who," said Mr. Manners, with some surprise, "is the extraordinary personage that can leave you in doubt upon such a subject?"

Clarentine then related to him the sort of half engagement Mrs. Denbigh had formed for her in the morning; upon which, Mr. Manners brightening up, said with a smile—"I may then safely, Madam, renew my solicitation; since I can assure you it is not ten minutes ago, that I heard Mr. Westbury engage one of Lady A—'s daughters, who had just entered with her mother."

Clarentine laughed, and by no means sorry to be released from such a partner, very readily gave her hand to Mr. Manners, and suffered him to lead her towards the dancers.

Whilst they stood up, it was impossible to engage in any regular conversation; but after a long and confused dance, Mr. Manners seeing her look extremely fatigued, exerted himself to procure for her a seat, and conducting her to it, hastened to bring her some refreshment, and then placed himself next her during the remainder of the evening.

His conversation was lively and agreeable, and Clarentine found herself so well disposed to like him, that her spirits were insensibly revived by his atten-

tion, and her answers to all his gay remarks were made with a cheerfulness nearly equal to his own.

After some general discourse of this animated kind, addressing her somewhat more seriously—"May I ask Miss Delmington," said he, "what stay she designs making in this place?"

"It is very probable," answered Clarentine, "I may yet be here three weeks."—"And may I tell her," resumed he, "what the interested motive was that led me to venture such an enquiry?"

"If you please—certainly."

"Why then," said he, "I wished to know whether at my return from a short visit I am upon the point of making in Northamptonshire, I might flatter myself with the hope of still finding you here."

"In Northamptonshire?" repeated Clarentine, with a faint blush—"And whom, may I ask, are you acquainted with in Northamptonshire?"

"One of the oldest friends I have, Captain Somerset, has a seat in that county," answered Mr. Manners.

An involuntary half-sigh escaped Clarentine at these words, and an air of thoughtfulness once more overspreading her but lately re-animated countenance, she sunk into a total, but unconscious silence.

Mr. Manners sat some minutes unsuspectedly observing her; at length, however, addressing her again, "I believe," said he, "I have the pleasure, in Miss Delmington, to see a relation and a ward of Captain Somerset's?"

Clarentine only bowed.

"You have seen him lately, I presume?"

"No, Sir, not—not very lately."

"But, however, you can assist me in the solution of a mystery I am very anxious to have explained. Pray what has he been doing with himself all this winter? Is he, as has been reported, upon the point

of marriage ; and to his fair mistress, is it, his friends must attribute his long silence and neglect?"

Clarentine's varying colour during this speech almost betrayed her ; and the hesitating and embarrassed manner in which she answered him, yet more strongly denoted her emotion—

"I believe—I fancy," said she, "he is going—he will be soon married."

"And what sort of a woman is the lady he has selected ? You doubtless know her ?"

"Yes a little."

"Is she agreeable."

Scarcely sensible of what she was saying, "I can't tell," answered the distressed Clarentine.

Mr. Manners laughed—"Upon my word," cried he, "such a reply is not much calculated to give a *very* high opinion of the lady's merit ! I should be sorry to suppose, however, added he, more gravely, "that Mr. Somerset had made a choice that was unworthy of him."

Clarentine upon this, recovering greater presence of mind, compelled herself to say, though in a low and almost inarticulate voice—"I meant no reflection, Sir, upon the lady, believe me ; but, as I told you, knowing very little of her, I am ill qualified to decide upon her character. She is generally thought, I believe, remarkably agreeable."

"Well," cried Mr. Manners—"I shall certainly endeavour to see her when next I go to town. There is no man in whose happiness I take a greater interest than in Somerset's ; and no man, I am convinced, who deserves happiness more."

This conversation was here to Clarentine's infinite relief, interrupted by young Westbury, who, after leading his partner to a seat with the most obsequious respect, negligently approached Clarentine, and said—

"So, you have not danced at all, Ma'am, this evening?"

"Not, at least, with the cruel Mr. Westbury," said Mr. Manners, with a laugh—

"Cruel!" repeated he—"No, upon honour, that wasn't it! The fact is, I have been engaged,—that is conditionally engaged, to Miss A—, these three days."

"And the condition was, I suppose, Mr. Westbury," said Clarentine, archly, "that you were to renounce her, if an Earl's or a Duke's daughter claimed you in her stead!"

"I am sorry to hear such a partial account of your gallantry, Westbury;" cried Mr. Manners, shaking his head—"a poor miserable commoner like me will be afraid to speak to you soon!"

"Pshaw, pshaw, what nonsense you talk!" cried the young coxcomb, taking out his glass and beginning very critically to examine a party of ladies who just then were passing.

"Pray, Mr. Westbury," said Clarentine, selecting from amongst them one who was remarkably pretty, "what do you think of that young lady?"

"She's very well—but her hair is not turned up high enough—you don't see enough of the *contour* of her throat."

"Well, but what do you say to the one who is walking next her?"

"Her waist is hideous—and those long sleeves are entirely out."

"A little beyond, however," said Mr. Manners, "is a lady whose very elbows are bare—what's your opinion of her?"

"She's better—something better; but there's no ease, no *bend* in her form: she's as upright as a dart—there's nothing *picturesque* about her!"

Mr. Manners, now casting his eyes towards a poor girl who was extremely deformed, and yet dressed in the most extravagant height of the *ton*—"What do you say to *that* fair nymph, Westbury?" cried he—"she has *bend* enough, I hope?"

"Why she's not amiss, really, considering ; there's taste in the arrangement of her dress, and upon the whole she positively looks like a girl of fashion."

Here Mr. Manners and Clarentine, unable to preserve their gravity any longer, both burst at the same moment into a laugh, which offended the poor *connaisseur* so much, that completely discomfited, he turned upon his heel and abruptly walked away.

"Was there ever so absurd a puppy!" at length exclaimed Mr. Manners, following him with a contemptuous look as he crossed the room—"I've no patience with the vain idiot!"

"O, bless me," cried Clarentine, "do not bestow upon the poor little man such serious indignation ! I think he is extremely entertaining ; and to me his character is quite new."

"In what enviable retreat have you then lived," said Mr. Manners, "where these pests of society gained no admittance?"

"I have spent," answered she, laughing, "the greatest part of my life in Devonshire."

"O, happy Devonshire ! and thrice happy all its favoured inhabitants ! Must I despair of ever obtaining a refuge there ? If you have any pity, Miss Delmington, take me in your *suite* when next you go."

"What, and deprive the world of so willing an admonisher ! I would not be accessory to such an evil on any account."

During this speech, Clarentine, in taking her handkerchief out of her pocket, let drop without perceiving it a little silver trinket, which, as it fell, ringing slightly upon the ground, caught Mr. Manners's attention, and made him stoop to take it up. He looked at it very attentively a minute before he either spoke, or she knew what he held ; and then presenting it to her with a smile—

"Why," said he, "where *Certainty* should reside,

is *Hope* substituted in her place? Why does Miss Delmington carry about with her an emblem she should resign to those children of nature who are less partially endowed?"

Clarentine, who at first had not attended to what he offered her, now casting her eyes upon it, coloured violently, and eagerly seizing it, put it back into her pocket; at the same moment rising, and hastily saying—

"Can you imagine where your sister is?"

"No," answered he following her, "but if you will lend me your *anchor* to rest my hopes upon during the toilsome search, I will go in pursuit of her."

"I would not wish," said Clarentine, attempting to laugh, "you should rest them upon so feeble a support."

"To obtain *hope* from you then, any way but by surprise, is, I perceive, impossible! Pray, did Captain Somerset teach you the importance of that invaluable symbol?—was it *his* gift?"

"No, no," cried Clarentine, turning away from his arch enquiring eyes in great confusion, "it was not indeed!"

Mr. Manners, seeing her look really disconcerted, had too much good-nature to pursue the subject; but whenever, in the course of the evening, her eyes again met his, she beheld in them an expression of comic significance, that abashed her so much, she was obliged immediately to look another way.

When they were going, and he was leading her to the carriage—

"Captain Somerset, I presume," said he, "in his province of guardian, has the happiness of corresponding with you, and therefore, Miss Delmington, if I request to be made the bearer of any letter you may wish to send him, I hope I shall not be thought impertinent."

Clarentine, endeavouring to speak with steadiness, said—

"When, Sir, do you set out?"

"On Thursday morning, and, if I have your permission, to-morrow I will do myself the honour to call for your despatches."

They were now at the coach door, and Clarentine had only time to bow her thanks, before, having handed her in, he wished her good night, and returned to the ball-room.

Provoked at her own unguarded behaviour, and extremely mortified at the idea of having given rise to any strange conjectures in Mr. Manners, Clarentine was absent and silent the whole way home, and spent a night of unusual restlessness and disturbance. Half dreading, yet half wishing to see him the next day, she determined, by the assumed tranquillity with which she meant to listen to all he could say, even concerning Somerset, to dispel every suspicion he might entertain, and prevent every remark he might promulgate. The *anchor*, (Lady Julia's former gift) which had unfortunately excited so many embarrassing reflections, she immediately locked up, almost tempted (diminished in her eyes as at this time was its illusive value) to throw it wholly away. She had hitherto kept it expressly in remembrance of Somerset; but so earnestly did she now wish to drive him from her thoughts, that even this trifling memorial she thought it almost wrong to preserve.

At breakfast the next morning, when Mrs. Denebigh asked for an account of her ball, she faithfully related to her all that had passed, and prepared her for the visitor they were to expect: after which, sitting down to write to Somerset, she shewed her, when she had concluded it, the following cold and formal epistle.

CAPT. SOMERSET.

Bath, December.

“DEAR SIR—The letter you wish to deliver to Madame d’Arzele in my name, I shall be happy to send whenever, or wherever you please. It will give her pleasure, I am sure, to become known to you.

“Accept my best thanks for your obliging enquiries concerning my health, which is, I flatter myself, considerably amended, and, I doubt not, will soon be perfectly restored.

“Mrs. Denbigh joins with me in hoping your intended excursion will prove agreeable, and desires her best compliments.

“I remain, dear Sir, with great regard, your obliged and grateful humble servant.

“CLARENTINE DELMINGTON.”

“This letter is what you may call short and—*not sweet!*” cried Mrs. Denbigh, when she had read it; “he will think, I fear, it accords very ill with the kindness and cordiality of his own.”

“I hope and believe,” said Clarentine, affecting to speak with indifference, “he will think very little about it.”

“There are cases,” said Mrs. Denbigh, “when young ladies may be permitted to *tell lies* with impunity, and this is one; or else, Clarentine, you may depend upon it I should not suffer that false, *I hope*, to pass uncensured.”

“Ah, my dear madam,” said Clarentine, half smiling, “there would be no end of censuring me upon that score, for, of late, my *whole life* has been a *lie!*”

“Some part or other of every body’s life must be such,” said Mrs. Denbigh; “mine was a lie, when

at sixteen an old grandmother I had carried me down into Northumberland, and obliged me to tell her I liked it! My poor husband's was a lie, when he first married me, and thought it needful to say he loved me!"

Here Clarentine, who sat directing Somerset's letter at the table, discontinued her employment, and looking up with an air of innocent surprise, said—
" And did he not love you, then?"

" No, not all, the first six months."

" Good Heaven, how terrible! How could you marry him?"

" In the first place, he told *his lie* so well, I did not know he had this dislike to me; and in the next, my father chose him for me, and left me no negative voice."

" Well, but," said Clarentine, eager to hear the result of this frightful beginning, " did he love you better afterwards, Madam? Were you happy?"

" Yes, very. I never suspected his affection had been dissembled till he told me so himself, and by that time it was become real, though by no means, I must acknowledge, *romantic!*"

" And yet," said Clarentine, " without a little romance in youth what is life good for?"

" Every rational enjoyment that sober common sense ought to render valuable to us."

" But, my dearest Mrs. Denbigh, do you expect me to have already acquired a sufficient portion of this *sober common sense* to think so?"

" No, I know you have not; but a little longer residence with me, I flatter myself, will give it to you. There are certain words with which *sentimentalists by profession* nourish their folly, that I have totally effaced from my vocabulary, and never permit even my friends to use if I can help it. *Delicacy* (such false delicacy as they mean) is one; *refinement* is another; *sensibility* is a third; *susceptibility* (the

most odious of all) is a fourth; *enthusiasm* is a fifth; and lastly comes that ideal bugbear **CONSTANCY**, a term of which no woman ought to know the meaning till after she is either married, or positively engaged."

Before Clarentine had time to answer this speech, the door opened, and Mr. Manners was announced.

Clarentine introduced him to Mrs. Denbigh, who, though she well knew the ladies of his family, had never before seen him, and then they all took their seats.

After some general conversation, casting his eyes towards the letter which still lay upon the table—“May I flatter myself,” said he, “that Miss Delmington has been so good as to remember the tacit promise she gave me last night? Are the credentials I am to carry to my friend ready?”

Clarentine, thanking him for condescending to become her courier, put the letter into his hands.

“Ah, Madam,” cried he, “call not that a condescension which is only a proof of my self-interestedness. Captain Somerset and I have been separated so long, that to secure myself as cordial a reception as in former times I was always assured of obtaining, I thought it necessary to apply for the most precious introductory presentation I could procure.”

“If that was your view,” said Clarentine, “it would have been more politic to have addressed yourself elsewhere: you had better, I believe, give me my letter again, for I much doubt its having the efficacious power you expect.”

“No, no, Sir,” cried Mrs. Denbigh, “keep it now you have it: a long absent friend requires not such potent recommendation as one whom we have seen more lately, and therefore content yourself this time with being the bearer of a mere letter of civility, and reserve for your *next* meeting the letter of tenderness.”

"I am sorry you give me reason to suppose," cried he, "both will not come from the same hand."

"Nay, that is ungrateful!" said Mrs. Denbigh, "when instead of *one* we are proving to you that you have *two* strings to your bow, ought you to express such a regret?"

"My regret, Madam," answered he, "may find some apology in its disinterestedness—it is wholly for my friend."

"Are you not afraid, Mr. Manners," said Clarentine smiling, "that your partial gallantry will incur the same reproach Mr. Westbury's received from you last night? You know nothing of the lady at whose expense you have now been pleased to compliment me, and can by no means be certain your regret is at all justifiable."

"I have two infallible guides upon this subject," cried he; "my ears upon one occasion, and my eyes whenever I have the honour of seeing you."

"Your ears?"

"Yes; did they not last night inform me, that Miss Delmington, whose countenance alone bears testimony to her natural candour, thought the lady in question too insignificant an object to merit any place in her remembrance? Such a discovery may surely well justify my regret!"

"I was not aware," said Clarentine, deeply blushing, "of the severe inference you would draw from so momentary a fit of absence!"

Mr. Manners was beginning some very eager reply, when the entrance of his sister, and presently after of Mr. Westbury, put an end to the subject.

As the morning, though cold, was clear and fine, Miss Manners, at the end of a short visit, proposed to Clarentine taking a walk with her to the Upper Crescent; to this she very readily consented, and

escorted by the two gentlemen, they immediately set out.

Mr. Manners kept by her side during the whole way, alternately amusing her by the aptness and vivacity of his general remarks, and embarrassing her by the archness of his distant allusions to the subjects she had before so gladly flown from: the perfect good breeding, however, with which he thus ingeniously tormented her, and yet more, the indulgence which his acknowledged intimacy with Somerset unconsciously disposed her to shew him, prevented the possibility of her being seriously displeased, and kept her in good humour with him till the moment they parted.

In their way home, Miss Manners addressing Clarentine in a low voice, whilst Mr. Westbury's head was turned aside, said, "I must call this morning at Mrs. Westbury's—my mother desired it; but do pray go with me."

"If you wish it," answered Clarentine in the same tone, "I will certainly; but what makes you ask it so earnestly?"

"O dear, there is nothing so formidable to me as a forenoon visit there: she is always surrounded by snarling politicians, and solemn authors, and musty dictionaries, and huge folios, and up to her very chin in learning and philosophy; and I know nothing in the world of all this."

"But do you expect me," said Clarentine, laughing, "to be any wiser?"

"O no, you're a good unaffected creature, I know; but if you go with me, I shall, at least, have somebody to talk to, whom I can understand and be understood by."

"If that is your reason," said Clarentine, "I am wholly at your command."

They were now arrived at Mrs. Westbury's door,

and still attended by Mr. Manners (young Westbury made his bow as soon as he found where they were going), gave in their names, and were shewn up to that lady's dressing room.

Clarentine, as she entered, beheld the *female critic* sitting before a large table, covered with books, pamphlets, papers, pens and ink. Stretched out at his ease, in an arm-chair near the fire, sat a portly and learned professor of mathematics, who, by the start he gave as they walked in, evidently betrayed either how deeply the sublimity of his contemplations, or the soundness of his *stolen nap*, had previously absorbed every faculty. Intently poring over some profoundly scientific *Greek manuscript*, which, in honour of his own learning, he had brought with him in his pocket, at one end of the table, opposite Mrs. Westbury, sat a little withered, smirking man, in a rusty black coat, who, at the same time that he aspired to the reputation of a *savant*, likewise aimed at that of a man of gallantry, and was the ladies most obsequious and devoted slave. Lastly, balancing himself as he stood near the window, was a short, thick, clumsy-looking man, with enormous black eye-brows, frowning over a newspaper, and muttering execrations to himself every word he read.

"And which," said Clarentine, addressing Miss Manners in a low voice, after they had been some time seated, "which of these three dignifies himself with the title of *philosopher*?"

"Why, I believe, they every one pretend to it in some degree; but the philosopher *par excellence* is *that gentleman*,"—looking towards him who frowned at the window.

"I should sooner" said Clarentine, "have taken him, by his employment, for a *politician*."

"O, he's both: politics and philosophy always go together now."

“ His countenance, at least, does not denote him to be of the sect of *laughing philosophers*.”

“ Bless me, no ; he never laughs but *in scorn*.”

Here their attention was attracted by the little man in black, who looking up with a set smile, and waving his hand as he spoke, said—

“ Madam, I must beg leave to assure you, that in this short disquisition there is more exquisite eloquence, more wonderful profundity, more accurate criticism, than in any performance of the kind I have met with for many years.”

“ Whose writings does it criticise, Mr. Lea ?” enquired Mrs. Westbury.

Mr. Lea, with extreme emphasis, uttered some hard Greek name, and was then proceeding thus—“ It can be no new information to a lady of your universal erudition, that this incomparable author”—when the *philosophical politician* abruptly interrupting him called out—

“ These d—mn—d news-writers ! How they do make my blood boil ! Here’s a fellow now,” striking the back of his fingers against the paper, “ who for half a crown a day will say and unsay the same confounded lie six times in one week !—By all that’s good, Madam,” turning to Mrs. Westbury, “ it astonishes me to think you can take in such a flagitious compilation of falsehood and infamy.”

“ Is this a specimen of that gentleman’s *philosophy* ?” asked Clarentine in a low voice, turning to Miss Manners.

“ Hush, hush !—Hear the lady’s answer.”

“ My dear Sir,” cried Mrs. Westbury, “ you are partial, you are prejudiced : that’s one of the best papers that comes out.”

“ Ay, Ay !” said the learned Doctor, “ let me see it then ; I want to change mine, and I don’t know what other to order.”

"Take my word for it, Doctor," said Mrs. Westbury, "you can't choose a better than that. But now, Mr. Lea, let me hear a little more about your Greek manuscript: what author did you say."

"Madam," interrupted Mr. Lea, the same invariable smile still adorning his countenance, "with your permission, before these young ladies," looking particularly at Clarentine, "we will have recourse to some more compatible subject. Doubtless to the minds of uninitiated youth these remote and inapplicable themes must be too intricate and unperspicuous to afford them any portion of mental recreation: and, Madam, I make it a point, as pertinently as I can, to administer to all such conversation as I surmise best accords with the age, sex, and capacity of my auditors."

"O, mercy," said Miss Manners, in a whisper to Clarentine, "there will be no enduring that man if he once takes it into his head to address his pedantic *jargon* to us? Do pray, let's be off."

Clarentine, as little disposed to prolong the visit as her friend, instantly arose to go; and Mr. Manners starting up at the same moment, they all three took their leave and hastened away.

When they were in the street, "Good Heaven," exclaimed Clarentine, "how different a woman Mrs. Westbury always appeared to me before! I never saw her so surrounded till this morning."

"O, she *has* a few lucid intervals," cried Miss Manners, "and before Mrs. Denbigh, particularly, I've known her very rational: however, we did not stay half long enough to behold her in her real perfection; I dare say she and the politician will have a furious quarrel before they part!"

"But now," said Clarentine, "will you have the goodness to explain to me your reasons for dubbing him a *philosopher*?"

"Why, in the first place, he publicly professes Atheism, and in the next—"

"O, that's enough!" interrupted Clarentine; "I desire to hear no more either of him or his principles."

"Well, then, let's change the subject; what do you do with yourself this evening?"

"I shall stay at home to rest after the raking of last night."

"O, that's a horrid plan! You had better go to the play with us."

"*Much* better," said Mrs. Manners.

"No, indeed," cried Clarentine, "if I had no other objection, I could not bear to leave Mrs. Denbigh two evenings alone."

"O, Mrs. Denbigh shall be of the party!" cried Miss Manners—"I'll run up and ask her directly."

And then, without giving Clarentine time to stop her, being just arrived at the door and finding it open, she rushed into the house and up stairs in a moment, Mr. Manners and Clarentine both following her.

Before they reached the dining-room, Mrs. Denbigh, unwilling to neglect any opportunity of dissipating her young friend's thoughts, had already given the consent that was required of her; and soon after, rejoicing in their success, the brother and sister went home to dress for dinner.

"Why, my dearest Madam," cried Clarentine, when they were gone, "what a life you are determined I shall lead!"

"Any thing, my good child, rather than suffer you, in your present disposition of mind, to stay at home and *think*."

"Do you, then, imagine it is impossible to think in a play-house?"

"Oh, perverse people will do what they ought *not* to do, every where, but I am persuaded less effectually in a play-house than shut up in their own apart-

ment. Go up and dress therefore, and let me hear no more *delicate objections.*"

Clarentine half provoked, yet unable to refrain laughing, was forced to obey, and at night when she returned, almost against her own will, was compelled to acknowledge she had really been entertained.

CHAPTER XX.

NEAR a week now passed on much in the same dissipated manner ; at the end of which, Clarentine, wholly unused to such a way of life, was laid up with a severe cold, and obliged, for several days, to confine herself entirely to her own room.

During this penitential retreat, she received a second letter from Sophia.

MISS DELMINGTON.

Delmington-House, January.

"I do not know what you may be in *your* part of the world, but *here* we have been exceedingly gay. Lord Welwyn gave a very elegant ball two nights ago, at which we were all present, and I had the honour of dancing, if not the whole evening, at least the greatest part of it, with your friend Mr. Eltham. Since he has made me (or rather since I made myself) his confidant, it is astonishing what progress I seem to have made in his good graces : he never has a sorrow or a joy that he does not come to impart to me ; and as both very often arise from causes equally frivolous, he has now got so used to being laughed at, that he not only bears it with stoical patience, but sometimes even catches the infection. The grim aspect he brought down with him is considerably improved within this last fortnight, and I have great rea-

son to hope, that I shall now in a short time restore him to all his former gay and youthful gallantry.

" My dearest mother, who knows nothing of his motives for thus distinguishing and attending me, and, I dare say, concludes very often he is insidiously laying siege to her daughter's heart, when, in fact, he is only bewailing the cruelty of her niece, looks extremely grave upon these occasions, and yesterday, without assigning any reason for it, had the inhumanity to forbid my ever going alone to Welwyn Park while he stays there ! Dear Madam, you need be under no alarm !—he thinks of me only as of a good-humoured rattle, whose conversation serves a little to beguile the horrors of disappointment, and lighten the burden of his heavy woes ! He must be certain *I* have no design, and *I* believe we may all be equally certain *he* has none.

" My brother Edgar is now at home, and pays very assiduous court to his pretty mistress, who, by the way, really grows prettier and prettier every hour :—aye, Clarentine, and so do I too, if I am to believe honest friend Eltham !—He was yesterday (and yet I had been up dancing half the night before) complimenting me upon this subject, in a style of courtliness it would, I am persuaded, have done your heart good to hear, when, finding he dwelt longest upon the lustre of my charming eyes, I hastily interrupted him to ask, whether they were like Lucy Barclay's, of dauntless memory !

" Heaven forbid !" exclaimed he laughing—

" In what do they differ ?" enquired I—

" In every thing—in form, in expression, and even in colour."

" Are they like Clarentine's ?"

" He hesitated—but at last said—" I have reason to think them preferable."

" And why so ?"

" Because," answered he, smiling, " their beams,

though arch and sportive, are likewise merciful and friendly—and upon me were never played, but with a sort of tempered fire, which animates without appalling."

"There, Clarentine—what do you think of my *animating powers!* By this account, however, of the *appalling* influence of yours, I fear, my good girl, you dealt very hardly with his poor man. He is horrid sore yet, and your name, unexpectedly uttered, will often make him literally start! I take pretty good care, though, he should never do so on hearing it from *me*; for when we are together, I am perpetually repeating it, on purpose, as you do with young skittish horses, to use him to the object he shies at. Edgar used to be quite as *nervous* upon this subject; but I think that all powerful medicine, absence, has now nearly cured him. In nervous cases brought on by *appalling eyes*, absence, I believe, is your only valerian!"

"My mother has just had a charming letter—elegant, respectful, yet friendly, from Mr. Somerset. He is now, as you know, I suppose, in Northamptonshire, and purposes coming here for a few days before he returns to town. I am enchanted at the idea of seeing him, and my mother, likewise, is so much pleased, that she has written to him by return of post to express the great satisfaction such a prospect gives her."

"I could not help thinking, whilst I was reading his letter, what an incomparable trio we should have, if this unhappy man (as I cannot but suspect) is also one of your *cast-offs!*—yet—*Somerset* unsuccessful! how should that be?—Eltham would not be so icy about him if he was really a brother-willow! I cannot make it out; yet something there is to make out, I am certain. I wonder whether it will be possible to wreath myself into *his* confidence as I did into Eltham's: I am afraid not. Wiseacres like you and Somerset are never so easy to expound, as crazy-brained people like Eltham and I."

“ Your poor Madame d’Arzele is upon the eve of experiencing a severe loss : her brother, our excellent Chevalier, is going abroad very shortly to join some troops in the West-Indies, I believe, or in Germany, or Holland, or somewhere in short. We are all greatly concerned at his departure, and as for her, poor little soul ; she looks quite unhappy. Write to her again soon, my best Clarentine ; and since she cannot be revived by your cheering presence, soothe and comfort her by your distant kindness. There is nobody, I believe, upon earth, she loves with more tenderness than you—therefore one word of consolation from your pen will weigh more than thousands from our lips.

“ Galloping up the avenue, here comes Mr. Eltham : farewell therefore ; I am going to hold his stirrup while he alights !

“ Yours ever,

“ S. D.”

Clarentine read this gay letter to Mrs. Denbigh, who was sitting with her at the time she received it, and, who, when she had concluded, said with a smile—

“ *Designs*, I believe indeed, your giddy friend has none ; but *without* design, if she don’t take care, it appears very probable her little heart will be drawn in : she will flutter about the flame till she singes her wings—I only wish *he* may singe his *whiskers*, and then all will go well, and they may make a very happy couple. Is she pretty ?”

“ Yes,” answered Clarentine, “ she has a sort of *Hebe* face, full of dimples and good-humour, that is, extremely bewitching ; and the dazzling brightness of her complexion surpasses any thing I ever beheld.”

“ O then,” said Mrs. Denbigh—“ with such a character and such a form, she will attach him I have no doubt ; at present he is not upon his guard against

her; he looks upon her, as she says, merely as a comic, laughing girl, with whom to chat and rally is as safe as it is pleasant. In a little while, however, if she is really thus attractive, shut up as they both are in so secluded a part of the world, he will find himself restless and *ennuiez* without her, and to obviate all future *dismissions*, will, at once, honestly declare himself, and make proposals to her family."

"Your prediction, my dear Madam," said Clarentine, "exactly reminds me of what Mr. Eltham once said of her himself: he was describing her, as you have done, as a gay, animated girl, who without beauty enough to fascinate at first sight, *would begin by amusing, and end by attaching*: if such should be the case, however, do you think my poor Sophia would be permanently happy with him?"

"Why not? We never heard that Mr. Eltham, though wild and thoughtless, was decidedly profligate, or deliberately wicked. His temper, you once said, Lord Welwyn had told you was admirable, no contradiction of which were the impassioned and lover-like rages he fell into on being so abruptly discarded: any man of strong feelings upon such an occasion might be pardoned for betraying some degree of resentment: and really, my censures upon him have always been so mixed with pity, that I am rejoiced to think he has, at last, met with an honest, unsentimental girl, who will permit him to lay his willows at her feet."

"You seem to be of opinion, Madam," said Clarentine, "he was ill used!" "Not exactly that; but he was certainly *harshly* used, and at the time he received his *congé* had really done nothing to deserve it."

Clarentine, a little shocked at the incontrovertible truth of this observation, remained silent; and Mrs. Denbigh, reading her thoughts, hastened to change the subject.

At the end of a few days, Clarentine was sufficiently recovered to be able, though she still confined herself in an evening, to walk out about an hour every morning. It was on her return from one of these early rambles, that, ascending the steps of Mrs. Denbigh's house, she beheld Mr. Manners, who, after a fortnight's absence, was hastening, he said, to pay his respects to her.

Clarentine, in whom his presence always awakened an emotion of mingled pleasure and confusion, which was now increased by the recollection of his having so lately parted from Somerset, blushed deeply the instant he addressed her ; and during some minutes, had scarcely presence of mind sufficient to answer his general enquiries with any tolerable degree of steadiness or composure. This, however, he affected not to observe ; but when they reached Mrs. Denbigh's usual sitting-room, and the first compliments between him and that lady were over, taking out his pocket-book and presenting Clarentine a letter, he said " From Captain Somerset, Madam, who at the same time that I delivered it, desired me to give his best respects."

Clarentine, now blushing a yet deeper die, received it with down-cast eyes, and in a voice scarcely audible, stammered out something like an acknowledgment for his goodness in taking charge of it.

" I hope, Sir," said Mrs. Denbigh, " you left your friend perfectly well ? "

" Yes, Madam, in *health*, I hope he was, but in *spirits* he appeared ill indeed."

Clarentine fearfully looked up ; and Mrs. Denbigh in a tone that was somewhat sarcastic, said, " And what can have affected his spirits so prodigiously ? "

" Hopelessness and absence," answered Mr. Manners, stealing a side-long glance at the astonished Clarentine.

"Very extraordinary complaints for a man to suffer by, who has his cure in his own power?" cried Mrs. Denbigh, with yet increasing irony—"Pray, why does he prolong his absence if it causes him such exquisite misery?"

"Because he has no encouragement to shorten it."

Mrs. Denbigh was silent a moment, and then, shaking her head, and looking very humble, she said, "You are too problematical for me, Mr. Manners: I must give up all hope of understanding you."

"And do I appear to you, Miss Delmington, equally unintelligible?"

"Equally, Sir,"—answered she, in a low voice.

"You have more anxiety, however, to elucidate the mystery?"

"No, not at all."

"Then, certainly," resumed Mr. Manners, "I will not presume to force an explanation upon you; we will therefore start another subject; pray who did you dance with at the last assembly?"

Clarentine, though extremely provoked with him, compelled herself to answer this, and several other questions of the same nature, with an appearance of perfect unconcern; and very soon after saying he hoped he should have the honour of meeting her at the rooms in the evening, he arose and took leave.

Mrs. Denbigh and Clarentine sat looking at each other some minutes after he was gone, in utter silence. At last, "Are we to understand by all this," cried Clarentine, "that Mrs. Hertford is *grown cruel*!"

"I imagine so," answered Mrs. Denbigh, laughing, "or that Somerset himself has changed his love, and embibed a passion for some fair tygress."

Clarentine shrugged her shoulders with a look of

incredulity, but forbearing to say any thing further, broke open the letter Mr. Manners had brought her.

It contained not more than six lines, and was written with a coldness almost equal to her own. He began by thanking her for granting his request; and then, begging she would send the promised letter to him at Lady Delmington's as soon as she had leisure, concluded with a few faint congratulations upon the emendation of her health.

Clarentine's heart was too full, when she had read this chilling scroll, to make any comments upon it; therefore putting it silently into Mrs. Denbigh's hand, she retired to her own room to execute the commission it contained.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE last week of Mrs. Denbigh's stay at Bath was now nearly elapsed, and she and her young friend were already making preparations for their departure, when, just as they had risen from breakfast one morning, Miss Manners unexpectedly made her appearance.

"I am come," cried she, eagerly, "to beg, to entreat, that you will spend the evening at our house to-morrow: we are to have a delightful little private dance, only fifteen or sixteen couple, and as I have heard you say, Miss Delmington, you cannot endure the great assemblies, I *insist* upon your coming to our Lilliputian one."

"You are very peremptory!" cried Clarentine, smiling.

"Why the dance was half made on your account."

“On my account?”

“Yes; mama was very unwilling to agree to it, till my brother and I determined her, by representing the necessity of doing something civil by Mrs. Denbigh and you before your departure.”

“O then,” said Mrs. Denbigh, “I am to take a share in this honour?”

“Certainly.”

“But who do you intend shall open the ball with me? Will your brother, do you think, lead me out?”

“I have not a doubt of it,” answered Miss Manners, laughing.

“Very well then; go home and desire him to get his white gloves ready, and tell your mother, that if she will permit us to make our curtsies at eleven o’clock, we will do ourselves the honour of waiting upon her.”

“At eleven o’clock? Dear me, why so early?”

“Because the next day we design to begin our journey, and it has always been my plan, on the eve of travelling, to endeavour to get a little sleep.”

“But Miss Delmington need not run away so soon?”

“If she is wise, I think she will; all that, however, I leave to her own determination.”

Miss Manners then shaking hands with Clarentine, and thanking Mrs. Denbigh for her ready acquiescence, hastened away full of bustle and business.

The next day, about an hour before she set out to fulfil her engagement, the following letter was delivered to Clarentine from Madame d’Arzele.

MISS DELMINGTON.

Mont Repos, January.

“In what terms shall I thank my beloved and amiable Clarentine for the invaluable new acquaintance she has procured me? Your Mr. Somerset is

all that is excellent in man ; distinguished in his address ; elegant in his conversation ; kind, good, and benevolent in his nature ! He has made a complete conquest of me, and the noble trait I have to relate will, I hope, confirm his conquest of you.

“ Our Sophia, I find by the affectionate condolences contained in the letter your friend brought me, has informed you of the heavy deprivation I am about to sustain : my poor Chevalier leaves me in a few days, but he leaves me with a heart, proud as it is, so overflowing with gratitude, that there seems no longer to be in it any room for sorrow.

“ One of our late poets, you know, has justly and beautifully said, that

“ *En tout pays tous les bons coeurs sont freres.*”*

You will not be surprised therefore to hear, that your amiable Somerset and our *bon* Chevalier became friends almost from the first hour they met. The *loyauté* and the manly simplicity of their congenial minds, attached them to each other with a cordiality and zeal that did them equal honour, and afforded me the liveliest pleasure to behold. Day after day, by mutual appointment, they spent whole hours in wandering about the country together, talking over the wretched situation of poor unhappy France—*attristant* themselves, one minute by fearful predictions, and cheering each other the next by brighter conjectures. At length, however, Mr. Somerset’s time was expired, and he called to take leave of us : it was this very morning, and my brother and I were both talking of him when he appeared.

“ My excellent friends,” cried he, as he entered, “ I am grieved to say that I am now come to bid you farewell : the happiness I have derived from your society since I have been here, scarcely leaves me the

* *Florian.*

courage to quit you ; and yet," added he, a gleam of unusual satisfaction brightening his expressive face, " and yet, I have a faint hope held out to me, that the motive for which I go may be attended with the most exquisite felicity to me ! Ah, Madame d'Arzele," continued he, taking my hand and half smiling, " what would I not give to make you the companion of my journey—the assistant in my researches into one of the best, but least penetrable hearts, that ever inhabited a female bosom ! "

" We both laughed at his acknowledged perplexity upon a subject we could not but allow must be so interesting to him, and sincerely wished him all the success he could desire. Who this *impenetrable female* was, however, we ventured not to enquire, nor did he seem disposed to inform us ; for, rising at the end of a short visit, he first paid his compliments to me in the most polite and friendly terms, assuring me he should take the earliest opportunity of waiting upon me whenever he renewed his visit in my neighbourhood ; and then turning to the Chevalier, and putting a small packet into his hand, " My friend," said he, " you will find two letters within that cover, which I must beg you to deliver for me when you reach your place of destination : they are directed : but you will have the goodness, before you go, to seal them." So saying, he shook hands with him in the most cordial manner ; wished him health and prosperity ; embraced the children ; and bowing again to me, sprang into the chaise that was waiting for him at the door, and drove away with a velocity that soon carried him beyond our sight.

" We returned melancholy and silent, into the parlour ; and there the Chevalier, glad of any thing to do, opened the packet, and taking up the sealing-wax, prepared to obey his friend's last request. Judge, however, what were his sensations, when, in addition to the above mentioned letters, which were

directed to two British officers in the West Indies, he beheld, addressed to the *Chevalier de Valcour*, and enclosed in a written *enveloppe*, a Bank bill for 100*l.*

“The papers dropped from his hands in astonishment unutterable, and in answer to my eager inquiries, all he could do was to point to them without having power to speak.

“I took them up. You may imagine what were my exclamations and feelings upon seeing a note; but never can you picture to yourself the strong emotion with which I read these words—

“*Les dons de l'amitié l'offensent jamais.*”

“W. S.”

“Generous, feeling, delicate Somerset! Oh, my Clarentine, that I dared but give utterance to the wish that now rises to my heart! There is but one other such mind as his in the world—and that she who possesses it may become sensible of his worth, and prove the sweet reward of all his virtues—Yes, Clarentine, *that*, that is the fervent wish of

“Your own,
“EUGENIE D'ARZELE.”

There was something in the nature of this letter so deeply affecting to a heart, which, like Clarentine's, was alive to every impression that a tale of generosity, or an action of beneficence can awaken, that, melted by its perusal into the most grateful tears she had ever shed, there was nothing upon earth she would not have given for permission to indulge, that evening, in uninterrupted privacy, the sweet though half melancholy reflections that filled her mind. The prospect of going out—of dissipating her thoughts amidst a set of uninteresting people, from the subject that now so fully occupied them, was horror to her.

* *The gifts of friendship never offend.*

"To wish, or even to attempt forgetting Somerset," cried she, "I am persuaded will henceforth be impossible! I renounce all such visionary idea, and from this moment determine to cherish his remembrance at the risk of every thing—health, happiness, and peace. Careless whether he loves me in return, *my* love shall be wholly his: I wed myself to his image—it shall be my darling companion through life—the friend to whom, in fancy, I will repair for consolation, pour out all my sorrows, and dedicate every thought!"

Desperate now therefore, and indifferent what might in future be the effect upon her own mind of a resolution so fantastic and so wild, she concluded that in giving way to her imagination, in removing the severe curb she had hitherto put upon its wanderings, she should lighten her heart of half it had before suffered, and restore herself to ease and freedom. Somerset, she had not a doubt, loved another: to that other he was now, anxious and uncertain, in all probability gone. "Why let him go! and let him (she almost added) be successful! My silent admiration can neither injure his more fortunate mistress, nor disturb him: he thinks me cold, regardless, and indifferent. In ignorance therefore and in safety I may still nourish my attachment, and cheer myself at intervals, amidst the gloom that will surround me, with the soothing recollection of his excellence and worth!"

In this disposition of mind, and with a species of forced calmness, which painful as it was to her to assume, yet in some measure bore the appearance of serenity, she set out for Mrs. Manners's, unsuspected even by her penetrating friend, who accustomed to her being often absent, and ignorant of her having received any late letters, thought not of her present silence with any wonder, nor animadverted upon it with any thing but her usual good-humoured plausantry.

In the ball-room, one of the first persons who approached Clarentine, after she had paid her compliments to the ladies of the house, was Mr. Westbury. He began with something he intended should pass as an apology for his impertinence on the night of the former assembly ; and then requesting the favour of her hand for the two first dances, on her bowing her consent, almost mechanically, he sauntered back to his seat.

Very soon after, Mr. Manners, who at the moment she entered was conversing with some gentlemen in a distant part of the room, advanced towards her with the same petition. At first, so little did she know what she did, she was upon the point of accepting him ; but suddenly recollecting herself, she hastily said, " O no, I can't ; Mr. Westbury has just asked me."

" Poor Westbury !" exclaimed Mr. Manners laughing—" He has no reason to be vain of the readiness with which you think of him !"

Then lowering his voice, and looking at her very archly, " I wonder," added he, " what you *are* thinking of ? *Hope*, *Faith*, or *Charity* ?"

Clarentine, certain he alluded again to the anchor, coloured ; but affecting to laugh, said—" Of Charity certainly ; or else I could never endure *you* so patiently."

" O pray then," cried he, " always retain this precious virtue when in my company, and I promise always to furnish you with occasions to exercise it. All malice apart, however, will you do me the honour to go down the two *second* dances with me ?"

Again Clarentine bowed ; and Mr. Manners intreating her not to *forget* him, went up to speak to a fresh party that was just entering.

He had not left her many minutes, when a new candidate approached her in the person of the sententious Mr. Lea, who bowing to her with infinite

ceremony, begged leave to propose himself to her as a partner during the commencement of their festive revels !

Clarentine, unused to such a mode of pleading, and surprised at the idea of a man's dancing at all who seemed verging towards sixty, drew back her hand with a look of grave astonishment, and not certain she had perfectly understood him, said, " Sir ? "

" Madam," resumed he, " am I authorised to investigate into the number of your actual engagements ? Can you vouchsafe me the — "

" Sir," interrupted Clarentine, extremely sickened of him, " I am already engaged, I thank you, for the four first dances, and after they are over I shall go home immediately."

" I hope not," cried Mr. Lea, " I hope a lady whose physiognomy indicates such dulcet benignity, cannot meditate so direct a deviation from humanity ? "

Clarentine, not in spirits to be amused by this conceit, repeated her first declaration with increased coldness, and Mr. Lea, at length, walked away.

The dancing now in a very short time began, and Clarentine, who in the languid Mr. Westbury felt by no means sorry to have a partner who would suffer her to indulge her desire of being silent without interruption, was called to join in the set that was forming. Not long, however, had she reason to congratulate herself upon her good fortune ; for scarcely had she been standing up five minutes, when Mr. Manners led a young lady whom he had engaged since her refusal, next couple to where she was placed, and seemed determined to draw her into conversation.

" Pray, Miss Delmington," said he, half laughing, " how could you have the cruelty to listen to the eloquent Mr. Lea with such repulsive gravity ? I watched you the whole time he was speaking to you, and really never saw any thing so petrifying as

your countenance. What did he say to you, may I ask?"

"He talked to me, I believe," answered Clarentine negligently, "of the *dulcet benignity of my physiognomy!*"

Mr. Manners laughed heartily at this reply, and was proceeding to question her further, when a servant approaching him, said something in a low voice, and the next moment apologising to his partner for quitting her an instant, he hastened out of the room.

Clarentine, relieved by this unexpected summons, and in no humour to begin any conversation with her unknown neighbours, was now permitted to go up the dance very quietly; and although she yet scarce knew one step of the figure, was within two couples of the top, when, casting her eyes accidentally towards the door, she saw Mr. Manners re-enter the room, immediately followed by Captain Somerset!

An involuntary, but scarce audible exclamation of "Good God!" escaped her; and changing colour, it was with difficulty she knew how to keep her place, or stammer out a faint excuse for the sudden start and ejaculation which had given rise in her nearest neighbours to so much astonishment.

Meanwhile Somerset, still following his friend, was introduced by him to his mother and sister, the latter of whom, after a short conversation, he led towards the dancers, and stood up with himself, whilst Mr. Manners, apparently much satisfied with this arrangement, returned to his former station, and, but that he was prevented by her being now obliged to begin the dance, seemed very much inclined to return likewise to his former amusement—questioning and observing Clarentine.

Never was a dance worse gone down, or a figure more miserably blundered. Mr. Westbury, as ab-

sent from airs and *ton* as Clarentine was from real agitation, affected as little to know what he was about as herself ; and sometimes standing quite still, at others roughly, yet carelessly twisting every body round who came in his way, he made such a horrible confused business of it, that Clarentine, ashamed of the observation they both excited before they reached the bottom, entreated him to let her sit down, and without waiting for an answer ran to the first vacant seat she saw.

Persuaded now that Somerset either knew not that she was in the room, or forbore speaking to her through pique, she thought herself secure, in the remote corner to which she had retired, of not being noticed, and followed him with her eyes through the whole dance. Naturally well bred, and always extremely attentive to women, he conversed, she saw, occasionally with his lively partner, but with so little of his usual animation, and an air so absent, and even for him, negligent, that it was evident his thoughts were widely wandering from the subjects he discussed, and scarcely permitted him to speak upon them with common presence of mind.

When the dance was concluded, and the ladies were all hastily flying to their seats, Somerset in passing Clarentine's to conduct Miss Manners to one near it, at length saw and knew her. He stopped ; a deep glow instantly overspread his face, his eyes sparkled with delight, and unconsciously quitting his fair companion, he advanced eagerly towards her, saying, " Miss Delmington ! and I not know she was here ! not perceive her before ! "

" That," replied Clarentine, forcing a smile, and attempting to speak with composure, " is by no means wonderful, as I have been sitting still during the greatest part of the dance."

Just then they were joined by Mr. Manners, who seemed purposely to have forborne mentioning Cl-

rentine to his friend, for the malicious pleasure of witnessing the first effects of his surprise on beholding her.

"Mr. Somerset," said he gravely, "will you have the goodness to conclude one part of your business before you take any other in hand? My sister is waiting for you to find her a seat."

Somerset looked a little disconcerted, but affecting to laugh, was actually going to repair his omission, when he perceived Miss Manners very composedly leaning back in a chair talking to some gentleman at the upper end of the room.

"Your sister," cried he, turning round again, "is already placed;" then once more addressing Clarentine, "have you no wish," said he, "to hear how I left your friends at Delmington, and *Mont Repos*?"

The mere name of the last mentioned place made her colour by bringing to her mind the letter she had so lately received: however she immediately said "I hope they were all well?"

"Yes, perfectly; indeed I think I never saw any of the party look better."

"Does Lord Welwyn still intend coming to town next spring?"

"He seems determined upon it; there is *one* individual in that part of the world, however, who I fancy you will see yet sooner."

"Sir Edgar, do you mean?"

"No: his gay sister."

"And what should bring her to town alone?"

"She will *not* come alone."

"Good heaven, then," exclaimed Clarentine, "is she married?"

"O, now," cried Somerset, laughing, "you are a little too precipitate! No, she is not yet married, nor, I believe, aware of the danger she is in of soon being so! but appearances are strongly against her: she is really sometimes almost grave."

“If that,” said Mr. Manners, who had hitherto listened in silence to this little dialogue, “is a symptom of impending matrimony, how soon we may expect to see Miss Delmington under some other name!”

“Is she then,” asked Somerset, anxiously fixing her blushing face, “so very grave?”

“Grave! she is even taciturn, and so subject to *fits of absence*, she forgets almost every thing.”

“I conclude,” said the conscious Clarentine, addressing Somerset, “you know enough of Mr. Manners, not to give implicit credit to his ironical expressions?”

“O, if I thought Somerset doubted me,” cried he, “I would give him a few *instances* directly.”

“No, pray don’t trouble yourself, but let me hear what further Mr. Somerset has to say concerning Miss Delmington.”

“O, his distress on account of your reported gravity has put all that out of his head; you’ll get nothing more from him, Miss Delmington, unless when he has recovered his consternation a little, you choose to take him for your partner during the two next dances, instead of me.”

“Setting aside all personal vanity,” cried Somerset, “upon my word, Miss Delmington, I think you will profit by the exchange, since at least, in me, you will be sure of not finding a tormentor.”

“I accept the offer then,” said Clarentine, (and she never spoke more truly,) “with gratitude.”

Somerset bowed his thanks, and *looked* them yet more expressively; whilst Mr. Manners, leaning down, said to her in a low voice—“This, I think, is the *first* time I have ever been so fortunate as to do any thing you sincerely approved?”

“I hope, at least,” said Clarentine, endeavouring to rally, “it will not be the *last*”—and then, seeing

young Westbury advancing towards her, she arose, and once more accompanied him to the dancers.

Somerset's looks, his voice, his manner of addressing her, operated upon Clarentine with the force of enchantment, and dispelled insensibly, but entirely, the thoughtfulness and dejection that had rendered her so indifferent to every thing during the early part of the evening. Restored to all her natural cheerfulness and vivacity, no cloud sat now upon her brow, no sadness oppressed her heart; but re-animated by the mere pleasure, after so long an absence, of again beholding him, a smile of innocent gladness played upon her lips, and an expression of delight beamed in her eyes.

Heedless, therefore, how her insipid partner acquitted himself, she went down the dance with a lightness and activity that appeared no less to shock and confound him, than it amused the observant Mr. Manners, who following her, when, breathless but not dispirited, she went back to her seat, said with a look more than usually provoking—"I really begin to think, Miss Delmington, I shall not have fortitude sufficient to renounce my prior claim. You went down this last dance so admirably, seeming '*to rise from the ground like feather'd Mercury*,' that I could have dashed my head against the wall for very madness, at the idea of having been blockhead enough to give you up!—Come," added he, "be generous and accept me again: I dare say Somerset will be perfectly content to go on with my sister."

"Mr. Somerset," said Clarentine, a little drily, "may go on with whom he pleases, but at all events, I look upon the engagement, Sir, between you and me as dissolved, and must beg you will excuse my renewing it."

"Good God, then why did you dance this last time so provokingly well, and the first so languidly

ill? I really thought you had been indisposed, and did not wish to stand up."

"And with that idea you imagined it was doing your friend a great favour to consign me over to him!"

"O, I could not tell what change *his* powers of entertainment might produce, and hoped he would enliven and revive you; *mine* I distrusted."

"And indeed you did well, for I think if I was to listen to you much longer you would make me completely low-spirited!"

"*Le compliment est gallant!*" cried he, laughing.

"I am afraid *not*;" said Clarentine, "but really you fulfil your promise, or rather your threat, so literally, that you sometimes exercise my patience too much."

"I find then," cried Mr. Manners, "you reserve your *dulcet benignity* for the fortunate Mr. Lea; at least you seemed infinitely more patient with him than you ever are with me."

"He only wearied—you purposely provoke me."

"O there's no harm in that, since at any time I had rather be said to partake of the nature of a provocative than a soporific!"

Here Miss Manners advanced towards them, to intreat Clarentine would make one in a set that was going to be formed for dancing a reel—"Nay, don't look shy," added she, seeing her shrink from the idea of so public an exhibition, "you won't be at all conspicuous, for I hope to get enough to make a double set." And then taking her hand, and drawing her away, she allowed her no time either for hesitation or objection.

Dancing among the liveliest and the most airy young people in the room, Clarentine, to her utter consternation, now beheld the profound and scientific Mr. Lea, affecting all the alertness and vivacity of a youth,

with all the sober symptoms in his countenance of a man bordering upon his grand climacteric. Not having been able to procure a partner to his taste (he was a great admirer of youth and beauty) for the country dances, he had, at last, thrust himself into one of the reels, and much to his own satisfaction, and yet more to the amusement of every tittering miss in the room, was displaying all his attitudes and graces to infinite advantage.

The moment the dance was over, a young lady, who as well as Clarentine, had been engaged in it, flew after her as she was returning to her seat, and eagerly called out—"Lord, Miss Delmington, can you possibly tell who that droll little old man is, who has been smirking and skipping away with us so oddly?"

"No," answered Clarentine, smiling, "I know nothing more of him than his name; but here comes Mr. Manners, who can perhaps give you better information."

To Mr. Manners, therefore, the fair enquirer next applied, who with great solemnity assured her Mr. Lea was a gallant bachelor, with a large fortune, and very much worth captivating by any single lady who might be allure by his appearance.

"*He* rich?" cried she, with a look of contempt—"Dear, that's impossible; he's got the shabbiest coat I ever saw in my life."

"You must not judge of *male Grecians* by their dress;" said Mr. Manners, "it should be left to the modern *female Grecians* to distinguish themselves in that way!"

"Lord, what don't you like the present style of dress?"

"It renders you so fascinating, that I am afraid of liking it *too* well."

Satisfied with this little compliment, the pretty *Grecian* then tripped away.

When she was gone—"Is it really true, Mr. Manners," said Clarentine, "that Mr. Lea is what you told us—a man of fortune?"

"Yes, upon my honour, have you any designs in consequence?"

"I think he would make an excellent husband for Mrs. Westbury."

"O no, they are too much alike."

"Don't you approve then of a similarity of dispositions and pursuits between married people?"

"Not to too great an extent: it either engenders a spirit of rivalry and contention between them, or makes them completely *fade* and mawkish, always echoing to each other the same unmeaning "yes, my dear," and "no, my dear."

Somerset, who, during the reel had been talking in the card-room with Mrs. Denbigh, now approached to claim his ready partner. Mr. Manners affected to resign her with the most violent murmurings, but at length, suffering her to go, said he would guard her seat during her absence, finding it impossible to dance again after making such a sacrifice.

Whilst they stood up, before they were too much engaged in the dance to be able to converse, Clarentine and Somerset, with apparently equal pleasure, renewed their discourse upon the subject of Delmington and its neighbourhood. He confirmed what he had already hinted of the mutual partiality of Eltham and Sophia; and said, that from the very great satisfaction with which Lord Welwyn seemed to observe it, he had not a doubt of his giving the readiest concurrence to the match. "Lady Delmington, however," added he, "like an anxious and tender mother, is evidently in some little alarm (Mr. Eltham not having yet declared himself) for her daughter's tranquillity and happiness. She knows not how to refuse him admittance, and yet his daily visits, I saw, gave her uneasiness: she thinks him insinuating and

agreeable, and should he now fly off, I fear, judges very rightly that poor Sophia's gaiety would fly off with him."

"Ah, how cruel it would be in any man," cried Clarentine, earnestly, "to destroy a gaiety so innocent and playful!—I could never forgive Mr. Eltham if he was the cause of doing this by my excellent Sophia!"

"I sincerely believe," cried Somerset, "he has no such design, and his uncle appears convinced of it."

Clarentine was very anxious to know, how, on their first meeting, Eltham had behaved to Somerset; but before she had gained courage to attempt any direct enquiry, he changed the subject, and asked her when she thought of leaving Bath—

"We go to-morrow," answered she.

"To-morrow?" repeated Somerst. "Do you indeed? And how, Miss Delmington, after all the gaiety in which you have here been engaged, will you be able to endure the privacy and retirement of Mr. Lenham's house?"

"Shall I gain credit," replied she, smiling, "if I tell you that all this dissipation has wearied me, and that I shall rejoice on being restored to my former way of life?"

"Yes," cried he, warmly, "credit of every description!"

They were now interrupted by being obliged to join in the dance, during the rest of which they had very little opportunity for continuing the conversation.

When Clarentine moved towards her seat, Mr. Manners, she found, had kept his word, and guarded it for her most strictly. On seeing her advance, he instantly yielded it; but choosing to station himself by her side, nothing further was said but upon general subjects, and at the end of her second dance with Somerset, Mrs. Denbigh called her to go home.

"At what hour in the morning," said Somerset, as he led her out, "do you set off?"

"At nine o'clock, I believe."

"And will you allow me to breakfast with you before you go?"

"Certainly!"

"Good night then, dearest Miss Delmington," cried he, gently pressing her hand.

"Good night," repeated Clarentine; and jumping into the coach, it immediately drove off.

Seldom, even in the earliest and happiest period of her life, had the heart of Clarentine felt more easy, more completely satisfied, than it did on her return from this ball. In the absence of Mrs. Hertford, to have seen, to have conversed and spent the whole evening with Somerset, was to her a gratification so unexpected, so new, and so superior to all others, that she felt as if it had repaid her for every inquietude she had lately endured. What could have brought him so suddenly to Bath she neither found it possible to divine, nor thought it much worth her while to conjecture; it was sufficient for her that he *was* there—that she should again behold him the following day—and that he still, notwithstanding the coldness of his letter, seemed to think of her with regard. There were intervals, when recollecting the motive which he had told Madam d'Arzele carried him from Delmington, she faintly whispered to her own heart, that it might be perhaps to investigate *her* sentiments he was come: afraid, however, of long indulging such an idea, she endeavoured to drive from her mind all anticipation of the future, and to rest her thoughts, contented and thankful, upon the serenity of the present.

Mrs. Denbigh before they separated for the night, observing the unwonted vivacity that danced in her eyes, and the cheerfulness, as well of her conversation, as the very tone of her voice, congratulated her

archly upon the change, and very earnestly requested to know what could *possibly* have occasioned it? Clarentine blushed and laughed, but ventured not to rally in return; and soon after went up to her own room.

CHAPTER XXII.

BEFORE Clarentine had quite completed her packing the next morning, word was brought her that Captain Somerset was below. The glad tidings no sooner reached her, than despatching what else remained to be done with all the quickness her half-trembling hands would allow, she ran down stairs to receive him.

A bright glow animated her whole countenance as she entered, and in a cheerful voice she called out—“ You would teach us to keep early hours, Mr. Somerset, were you often to breakfast with us.”

“ I should be happy,” said he, taking her hand and gazing delightedly at her, “ to teach you any thing that has the power of making you look so well.”

Clarentine was too conscious of the emotion which had occasioned these good looks, to receive this compliment entirely without embarrassment; changing the subject therefore directly, she withdrew her hand, and as she seated herself, said—“ I am afraid, as Mrs. Denbigh is not yet ready, it will be rather late before we have done breakfast and can set out.”

“ I hope, however, if it should,” cried he, “ you will think your escort strong enough to banish all alarm.”

Clarentine looked surprised, and Somerset watching her countenance whilst he spoke, added—“ You will not, I flatter myself, Miss Delmington, oppose

my intention of attending you in a separate chaise to London?"

"Scarcely able to conceal the pleasure this intimation gave her, Clarentine cast down her eyes, and in a low voice answered—"No, certainly—if you—if it was your design to leave Bath so soon."

"I had but one reason for visiting Bath at all," cried he, "and that cannot be answered by my now making any longer stay at it."

Uncertain how she ought to understand these words, and desirous, at least, that he should not suppose she applied them to herself, Clarentine now said—

"Is Mr. Manners also going to town?"

"I believe not."

"If so, you have surely made him a very short visit?"

"I do not think he appropriates any part of it to himself."

Clarentine now rose up, and moving towards the breakfast table, said with a half smile—"You are quite enigmatical this morning, Mr. Somerset, I am not at all equal to comprehend you." And then begging him to ring the bell, she busied herself in preparing the things for making tea.

Somerset, without attending to her request, or seeming to hear it, was approaching her and beginning to speak again, when the door opened, and Mrs. Denbigh appeared. He bit his lips, and immediately retreating, bowed to her from the place where he had before stood, but seemed unable to utter a word.

Mrs. Denbigh finding them both thus mute (for Clarentine, from the instant he had advanced, had felt a degree of agitation that now rendered her as incapable of speaking as himself), at length said with a laugh—"How long has this reciprocal silence lasted—and how much longer is it to last?"

Somerset recovering first, with a forced smile, answered—"Attribute it to *me*, Madam; Miss Delmington accused me when I *did* speak of doing it so unintelligibly, that I not only became fearful of attempting it again, but communicated to her a share of my own taciturnity."

"Mysteriousness seems to be a reigning fashion," said Mrs. Denbigh, "among the young men of the present day; your friend Mr. Manners is so incomprehensible sometimes, that he sat here talking to us a quarter of an hour the other morning without its being possible for either Clarentine or me to understand one word he said."

Then turning to her—"Have you made the tea, my dear? We shall be very late, I fear."

Clarentine, relieved by this change of conversation, repeated her request to Somerset that he would ring the bell, and soon after, the servant bringing up the water, they went to breakfast.

At the appointed time the chaise Mrs. Denbigh had ordered was at the door, and the next minute a second, attended by one of Somerset's servants on horseback, drove up likewise.

"Why, pray," said Mrs. Denbigh, as she was passing the window, "what are we to do with *two* chaises? and whose servant is that?"

Somerset then informed her of his design of accompanying them.

"Oh, you go with us Sir, do you? Then let me beg your postillion may take the lead, that in case we are stopped, the robbers may get the richest booty first, and afterwards come to us in good humour."

"Ah, Madam," cried Somerset, "they would think no prize so precious as that your chaise will contain."

"Umph!—Was that compliment addressed to the beauties of *my person*, or the charms of *Clarentine's mind*?"

"We will divide it between us," cried Clarentine, "and each take our share as well of what belongs to the person as the mind."

During this time the servants had been busied in cording the trunks behind the chaise, and arranging every thing preparatory to their setting out. When this was done, Mrs. Denbigh's man came to announce its being ready, and Somerset, assisting her and Clarentine to enter it, bade them farewell till they met at dinner, and hastening to his own solitary vehicle, got into it and drove after them.

"Well, my young friend," said Mrs. Denbigh, after they had rode on some time in silence, "does your heart feel as light just now, as your countenance looks complacent? It is a very agreeable thing, don't you allow, to travel at one's ease under safe and pleasant convoy, and to have it in one's power, in case of accident, to make signals to the *guard-ship*, and call it up in a moment?"

"Yes," answered Clarentine, laughing, "very agreeable."

"Spoken out like an honest, good girl!" cried Mrs. Denbigh. But pray now, tell me what brought our protector to Bath so opportunely?"

"Indeed, Madam, I know no more than yourself."

"You did not expect to see him when you went to the ball last night?"

"No certainly."

"Has he yet spoken to you of Mrs. Hertford at all?"

"Not one word."

"Should you have any objection to my asking him, as cautiously as I can, a few questions concerning her?"

Clarentine hesitated a moment, but at length said — "If you will have the goodness to make your enquiries when I am not present, none in the world."

"Very well then, I shall set about it as soon as we arrive at the inn, if I can find an opportunity."

Clarentine now infinitely better fitted to relate such an anecdote with composure than she had been the preceding day, communicated to Mrs. Denbigh the truly generous action she had heard of Somerset from Madame d'Arzele. The story made that lady's eyes glisten with tears, and became the subject of their conversation during the greatest part of the morning.

Amongst other things—"I have long known," said Mrs. Denbigh, "this youthful guardian of yours, and long believed that, 'take him for all in all,' there does not exist a man upon earth with a more noble spirit, or a kinder heart; these virtues, however, and the conciliating gentleness of his manners, make him but the more dangerous where he is beloved without a certainty of return; and I could almost regret, immediately after your having heard of him such an account, that he had not taken it into his head to go any where rather than where you could meet him."

"Oh, dearest Madam," cried Clarentine, "harbour not such a regret! His presence has composed, has soothed and been more beneficial to me than I have power to describe. I have now brought myself to such a state of mind, that I have no longer any expectations, and I believe shall be affected by no disappointment; to see him as a friend is all I wish, and—"

"Pooh, pooh! you are talking romance and platonism to me again! Be firm and resolute, Clarentine, and either determine to avoid seeing him in future at all, or endeavour to assure yourself you can see him upon some less delusive system."

"Endeavour to assure myself!" repeated Clarentine, a little dismayed—"Good Heaven, Madam, how would you have me effect this?"

"You sent off Mr. Eltham for dangling idly after

you, and not declaring himself; send Mr. Somerset off for the same reason."

" Dear Madam, can the attention he pays me be called *dangling*? Does it at all resemble Mr. Eltham's? And is he not much more authorised to pay it in his double connexion of guardian and relation?"

" If that attention was not destructive to your peace, I should say he was: but, Clarentine, do you believe you can ever persuade me it will be possible for you to return to common sense whilst you are hourly receiving it without knowing the design with which it is paid? A young woman should either be very certain of the mutual affection of a man she loves, or sedulously renounce his society, since absence, as your friend Sophia says, is the only cure for ill-placed partiality."

" I did not find," said Clarentine, suppressing a sigh, " that my cure had made any great progress during the two months we staid at Bath."

" Two months! six months my dear child, would scarcely be enough to eradicate your complaint! You have indulged it, as if you apprehended the recovery would be worse than the disease. However, I will say no more upon the subject just now; you have got into a sort of fool's paradise (pardon the expression) from which it is almost pity to recal you; and so here for the present ends my lecture.

She then began talking of indifferent things.

During the remainder of that day's journey nothing material occurred: Mrs. Denbigh had no opportunity of making the enquiries she meditated, nor had Somerset any of speaking to Clarentine apart. They all appeared cheerful and happy when they met; spent the evening in perfect harmony, and separated at night in unabated good spirits.

The next morning, about a quarter of an hour before they left the inn at which they slept, Mrs. Denbigh calling after Somerset, as he was leaving the

room to give some orders to his servant, begged him to shew her a letter he had promised to let her read from Mr. Lenham, containing some public news they had been talking over during breakfast. Somerset, hastily feeling in his pocket as he stood with the door half open in his hand, delivered the letter to Clarentine, who just then happened to pass him, and saying, "will you have the goodness to give it to Mrs. Denbigh?" ran away expecting the chaises would be announced every minute.

Mrs. Denbigh opened it as soon as he was gone, whilst Clarentine, not knowing how to fill up so comfortless an interval, traversed the room with listless steps, stopping from time to time to observe what was passing in the inn yard, and then renewing her walk.

In less than ten minutes Somerset returned, and Mrs. Denbigh gravely folding up the letter, presented it to him with great formality, and said, "Thank you, Sir, for the perusal of *this*; will you now be so obliging as to favour me with a sight of what Mr. Lenham writes?"

Somerset stared at first without comprehending her, but the next moment, casting his eyes upon the direction, eagerly seized it, and, colouring very high, said in great confusion, "I beg your pardon—it was a 'mistake—*this*," taking another letter from his pocket, "is what I intended, Madam, to shew you."

"I would advise you in future," said Mrs. Denbigh, rather drily, "to be more careful: these *mistakes* may sometimes be a little awkward."

Clarentine, during this short dialogue, had stood at the window, looking first at one, then at the other, with the utmost surprise and perplexity. She would have given the world to know with certainty whose the letter was, suspecting by Somerset's embarrassment it could be from no other than Mrs. Hertford:

not having courage, however, to hazard the least enquiry, even in raillery, she turned away on perceiving Somerset was looking at her, and felt truly rejoiced when a few minutes afterwards they were summoned to depart.

When the chaise drove on, unable any longer to repress her curiosity—

“Was that letter, **Madam**,” said she to Mrs. Denbigh, affecting to speak with indifference, “from a female correspondent?”

“No, from a flighty and impertinent male one.”

“I did not suspect Mr. Somerset of having any of that description.”

“Then you gave him more credit than he deserved.”

“May I ask,” resumed Clarentine, hesitatingly, “who?”

“You had better,” interrupted Mrs. Denbigh, “not ask any thing about the matter, my dear, for it could give you no pleasure to hear an account either of the subject or the style.”

“Dear **Madam**, did it contain any thing that related to me?”

“I see your curiosity is upon the rack, and therefore till it is gratified it would be vain, I suppose, to expect any rest. Know then, my dear child, that the letter is from **Mr. Manners**.”

“**Mr. Manners**,” repeated Clarentine, blushing—“Ah! then its contents, I fear, may be too well guessed!”

“Certain it is, at least,” resumed Mrs. Denbigh, “that he appears to have guessed *you* very thoroughly! He writes from Bath some days after his return from Northamptonshire, and begins by reproaching his friend for denying his attachment to **Mrs. Hertford**, and yet persisting so ungratefully in avoiding you. He relates to him, in confirmation of what he seems to have told him before of your partiality, the

little anecdote of the *anchor*, upon which, and upon your blushes and confusion at the moment he found it, he lays great stress, not doubting, I believe, its being Somerset's gift. Numberless other trifling circumstances he brings forward in support of his opinion; and concludes, after a long and very animated panegyric of you, by urging his friend, very strenuously, to renounce all connexion with that viper, as he is pleased to call her, Mrs. Hertford, of whom he affirms to have heard an exceeding equivocal character, and presses him to hasten immediately to Bath, to restore bloom to the cheeks, and happiness to the gentle bosom of the fair and too tender Clarentine!"

Thunderstruck by this mortifying detail, shocked to find she had thus cruelly exposed herself, not only to Mr. Manners, but, through him, to Somerset likewise, Clarentine, drowned in tears, and incapable of interrupting a relation, every word of which was a dagger to her heart, now alarmed Mrs. Denbigh so much by the almost convulsive sobs which escaped her, that reproaching herself for the facility with which she had yielded to her desire of information, she attempted—but for some time attempted in vain—to soothe and compose her by every argument she could devise.

When at length, however, the distressed girl had somewhat recovered, and was able to speak, "Oh! dearest Mrs. Denbigh," cried she, hiding her face upon her shoulder, "how am I ever to meet Mr. Somerset again? Indeed, indeed, I cannot bear to think of it! He will know you have reported to me every word of that hateful letter, and from my looks will endeavour to discover the truth of its contents. Where can I conceal my consciousness and my shame?"

Mrs. Denbigh, to calm her a little, then told her, that upon pretence of fatigue and indisposition,

she might, when they stopped to dine, retire to a private room, and have some refreshment sent her, without appearing at their meal at all. Clarentine most eagerly embraced this proposal, and thanking Mrs. Denbigh a thousand times for her considerate kindness in making it, recurred the next minute, once again to the subject of the letter.

"It was *pity* then," cried she, "pity for my self-betrayed weakness and folly, that brought Mr. Somerset to Bath! His love for Mrs. Hertford may not, nay, probably is not at all diminished, notwithstanding the sacrifice his friend's urgency in my behalf might, perhaps, from motives of generosity, impel him to make. Oh, dearest Madam! if you have any compassion, any regard for me, endeavour to undeceive—or rather, alas! to mislead him with respect to my real sentiments! Tell him, I conjure you, that Mr. Manners was in an error; that to any feelings of the nature he suspected no part of my conduct was to be attributed; restore him, in short, to the full liberty he before enjoyed, and never let me undergo the deep humiliation of being supposed so strongly infatuated, that nothing less than the extorted and reluctant vows of the man I love can save or restore me!"

"My dearest Clarentine," cried Mrs. Denbigh, who now saw her sufficiently revived to bear a little raillery, "you are always either upon stilts or upon crutches! Be a little rational, and give me no commissions of this sublime, but lying kind. In the first place, without knowing the true nature of Somerset's attachment to you, it would be madness supreme to tell the poor man you abhor—you can't endure him—you wish him every evil under Heaven! Such things are never said by moderate and civil girls! In the next place, to oblige you, were I even to stretch a point, and falsify my conscience so grossly, it is a thousand to one, whether, after what he has

heard, he would take me for any thing but a super-annuated dotard, telling fibs *pour mon bon plaisir*, and meddling in what does not concern me. All I mean to do, therefore, is to listen quietly to the explanation he will, no doubt, be himself solicitous to enter upon, and to report it to you faithfully and exactly. An old woman who does not wish to be styled a *match-maker* or a *match-breaker*, can, in honour, do no more."

When the chaise stopped, and Somerset, hastily alighting from his own, advanced to hand the two ladies out, unlike the smiling readiness with which she had accepted his services the day before, Clarentine shrunk back when he would have assisted her, and without looking at him, jumping off the step, ran into the house, and up stairs in a moment, leaving to Mrs. Denbigh the care of apologising for her, and sending some one to shew her to a chamber.

Confounded at her abrupt flight, Somerset silently followed Mrs. Denbigh into a parlour, where, grave and dejected, he threw himself into a chair near the door, seeming hardly conscious that any one was in the room. Mrs. Denbigh observed him some time without interrupting his reverie; at length—

"Miss Delmington," said she, "is fatigued with her journey, and not very well to-day; she has retired to lie down."

"Not well?" repeated Somerset, with a look of anxiety, "I am grieved to hear it; and yet," added he, hesitating, "almost selfish enough to feel, in hearing it, a species of relief."

"You imputed her silence, perhaps, to a wrong cause?"

"I hope I did: Mrs. Denbigh could never have the cruelty to communicate to her the purport of that fatal letter?"

"I communicated it," said Mrs. Denbigh, "to

obviate a suspicion of something worse : she might have thought, you know, it was a challenge, or a letter from a *dun*—or something very disgraceful indeed!"

Somerset now starting from his seat in great agitation, exclaimed—

"Good God! you have *really* acquainted her with its contents! Ah! then, her coldness is but too well explained! she must think me the most vain and credulous of men, and will fly my sight as an object of detestation!"

"No, not quite so bad as that, we'll hope ;—she certainly does not wish to see you just now, but when she gets over the first shock, her anger will chiefly rest where it is most due—with Mr. Manners."

"Manners has voluntarily and doubly imposed upon *himself*," cried Somerset, "and endeavour to impose upon others in a way it gives me the utmost pain to think of. With regard to myself, he has persecuted me with exhortations and remonstrances no less unnecessary, than, upon such a subject, they were extraordinary : the error he fell into with respect to Miss Delmington, though I dare not trust myself to expatiate upon it, is of a nature that has been yet more pernicious to me, and may be one of those, which, in its consequences, I shall have cause to rue whilst I exist!"

"I do not perfectly understand you, Sir," said Mrs. Denbigh ; "what error relating to yourself do you allude to? Is it possible that his suspicions concerning Mrs. Hertford."

She hesitated ; but Somerset, easily comprehending her meaning, exclaimed—

"Ah, Madam! have you also given them admittance? Have my true feelings been so little known to you that they remain yet to be explained? Mrs. Hertford," added he, "has been to me no more than

a friend from the first hour I saw her : I thought her worthy ; I believed her amiable and sincere ; she wrung from me the real secret of my heart, and her dissembled pity, her artificial softness, soothed and flattered me. Whatever the sentiments were she sought to persuade me I had excited in her breast, she well knew my power of returning was passed. Still, however, her gentleness, her apparent interest in my happiness continued : she made herself a sort of barrier between me and misery ; and the seeming generosity with which at the same time that she was hourly insinuating to me her own partiality, she extolled and applauded her lovely precursor, deceived me so egregiously, that I firmly supposed her one of the best, as she appeared one of the most candid of human beings."

" And what late reason have you had," said Mrs. Denbigh, " to change your opinion ? "

" Reason too incontrovertible," replied he, " to be disputed. Subtle and designing as she is, and guarded as in all her measures she has generally been, she was not, however, quite exempted from the vanity and weakness which often leads politicians to commit indiscretions ; she made herself a confidant ; and less from openness of heart than from the desire of obtaining admiration and praise for her ingenuity, revealed all her secret machinations to a female friend who has betrayed her. From that friend, a Mrs. Castleton, who she has unwarily, but deeply offended, I received, the day before I left Delmington, a packet of letters, including one from herself, which contains an abstract of Mrs. Hertford's life, and a number of others, written to her by that very lady, within these last three months. The first of these sufficiently told me what was the nature of the others, I read therefore only one of them, and turned from the rest with disgust and horror. Good God ! what a train of artifice and deception did it reveal to me !

I could not, but that I saw and knew the hand to be that of the unprincipled projector—I could not have believed that such determined hypocrisy, such unfeeling selfishness, existed upon earth! To have been made the dupe myself of her insincerity, I am vain enough to think, argues nothing to my disparagement: sorry should I be ever to find myself a match for such consummate duplicity. There were passages however in the letter, that made my blood boil with indignation! They discovered to me that she had not only deceived Miss Delmington in regard to my sentiments, (a circumstance which, unimportant as it may be to *her*, yet to me is deeply mortifying) but that pains had also been taken to infuse into her mind a belief, that I was coxcomb enough to credit the pretended insinuations Mrs. Hertford had given me of her attachment. In the first place, such insinuations never escaped her; and in the next, Miss Delmington may be assured, if they *had*, I am not of a disposition so lightly to imbibe conceit, or so easily to admit presumption."

Mrs. Denbigh, at the conclusion of this speech, lifting up her hands and eyes with consternation and amazement, exclaimed, "Is it possible! Good Heaven! Is it possible that in so young a mind such perfidy and deceit should be lodged! Your account, Mr. Somerset, makes me tremble, and rejoiced as I am at our general escape from so worthless a woman, I am yet shocked to be obliged to believe a character like her's exists!"

Then pausing a moment, she presently added in a lower voice, speaking to herself—"My poor Clarentine! How could I be cruel enough to blame your virtuous indignation, to discredit your too just suspicions!"

Somerset, who had caught the name of Clarentine, and involuntarily listened to what followed, now said,

"Dear Mrs. Denbigh, what suspicions do you mean? Why do you speak in a voice of such concern?"

Mrs. Denbigh had no time to answer him, for just then the servants entered with dinner.

Little was said whilst they were at table. Somerset's heart, and Mrs. Denbigh's mind, were too full to allow them to converse upon indifferent subjects, and whilst the attendants were in the room, it was impossible to pursue that which had before engrossed them.

"When once more, however, they were alone—" "I will not" said Mrs. Denbigh, "so far betray my trust, Captain Somerset, as to impart to you the *whole* of what I know; but this, for your present satisfaction, I have no scruple in telling you, Clarentine's opinion of Mrs. Hertford has long been such, that after the first moment, she never gave credit to the presumption, if you are pleased to call it so, which that lady sought to impute to you. She esteems you too sincerely to believe any thing to your prejudice; and, I am certain, has no desire so earnest as to retain your good opinion, and prove to you her own. I must insist upon it, however, that you do not, at this time, either attempt to speak with her alone, or to converse with her upon any but general topics: her mind is not in a state to bear immediate scrutiny; it has for a considerable period been so cruelly harassed, that it may truly be said to have been thoroughly unhinged. The intelligence I have to give her, however, you may rest assured, will afford her pleasure, in proportion to the just aversion she has long had for Mrs. Hertford, and the cordial regard she acknowledges for you."

Somerset, revived and enchanted by this friendly speech, promised implicit submission to the two injunctions it contained; and forbearing to extend his enquiries, eager and impatient as he was to know the

whole that had been alluded to, suffered Mrs. Denbigh to leave him and go up to her young friend.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“WELL, my dear Clarentine,” cried Mrs. Denbigh, in a tone of cheerfulness, as she opened the door, “our explanation is over, and your Somerset, your friend, is honourably acquitted.”

“Dear Madam,” cried Clarentine, her cheeks tinged with a vivid glow—“explain yourself, I intreat!”

“I will; but you must promise me first to behave reasonably during the rest of the day; to meet him with good humour, and to answer him, when next he speaks to you.”

“Ah Madam, do you think, if I hear of him as favourable an account as you teach me to expect, I shall require such an exhortation?”

“Why I don’t know; you may expect more, perhaps, than I have power to tell, or—”

Here Clarentine interrupted her, and too impatient for longer delay, besought her most earnestly to begin her relation.

Mrs. Denbigh, though always composed and tranquil herself, could yet make allowances for an impetuosity so natural at such a moment, and too kind to lengthen her suspense, entered upon the promised vindication immediately.

The predominant sensation with which Clarentine listened to a confirmation so undeniable of the selfishness and dissimulation she had long suspected, was horror mixed with thankfulness for the provi-

idential deliverance of a man so ill formed to cope with such artificial double-dealing. Too generous, however, to exult over a fallen enemy, to accumulate the measure of her errors by illiberal animadversions, or to add invective to contempt, she heard the whole account, though not in astonished, yet in determined silence, and when it concluded, permitted not herself to utter a single comment upon any part of it.

Much, however, remained for her still to learn; Mrs. Denbigh had hitherto confined herself wholly to the subject of Mrs. Hertford; she now spoke to her of Somerset himself—of his avowed affection—his modest apprehensions, and the considerate delicacy with which he had abstained from enlarging on the *Memoirs* Mrs. Castleton had sent him, and from particularising any peculiar instance of treachery relating to himself in the detestable correspondence that had been remitted to him."

"We may well suppose, however," added she, "what were the designs that correspondence disclosed, by the determined antipathy against Mrs. Hertford with which it seems to have inspired him. I doubt not but that it discovered to him, in their fullest extent, the mercenary views that seem to have actuated her; nor do I doubt at the same time, but that every page was fraught with triumphant anticipations of certain success. It is plain she never loved him; no woman truly attached writes of a lover to a friend in a style it would be prejudicial to her he should see; even when stratagems are employed to win that lover, if they are resorted to merely from motives of tenderness, a man forgives the *effect* in the *cause*, and though he slight the mistress, is flattered by the fondness. Not such is here the case: cold-blooded, heartless policy seems to have been her only guide; and without one of the excuses that

might be found for a woman of ardent imagination and strong passions, she has run, I begin to think, into all the intrigue that usually proceeds from jealousy and apprehension. I shall beg, however, to see the correspondence, since, shrewdly as I have descanted upon its supposed tenour, I must acknowledge myself to be by no means sufficiently *au fait* in all these intricacies of deception, to have yet acquired any distinct idea of her plans or her motives."

"Dearest Mrs. Denbigh," cried Clarentine, "why should you wish to sully your mind by an inspection so uninteresting and really so horrid? As for me, I am perfectly content to know there are such beings as coquettes in the world, without wishing to dive so deep into their hearts. Mrs. Hertford is detected, is betrayed; ah, then, let her faults rest in peace!"

"My dear child, this is all very well for you to say, and you to think—but let me, I intreat, derive what amusement I can from a detail so new, and I doubt not so instructive. I have no apprehension of being turned into a *coquette*, and as I never read Machiavel in my youth, am determined to study his modern archetype in my old age. I dare say I shall find it an exceeding entertaining pastime in a post chaise; and I am persuaded Mr. Somerset will most readily resign the whole budget, for he seems to have as great a horror of it as yourself."

Then rising up—"Here comes the chaise," added Mrs. Denbigh, "I have no time to lose therefore in applying for these same letters. Will you go down with me, or wait here till I send you word we are ready to set out?"

"I will wait here, if you please, Madam."

Mrs. Denbigh, upon this, immediately left her, and returning to the parlour—"Mr. Somerset," cried she, "have you got Mrs. Hertford's system of politics with you?"

Somerset smiled, and answered he had.

“ And may I ask to see it ? ”

“ Most assuredly,” and ringing the bell, he delivered to his servant a key, and directed him where to find the whole packet.

“ Well,” said Mrs. Denbigh, as she received it — “ you may expect, after such a perusal, to find in me some very extraordinary improvement. The opacity of my intellects (as Mr. Lea would say) wanted a little subtilisation, for I never could invent an ingenious plot in my life : this I hope will enable me to set up for a contriver through life. As for Clarentine, poor simple soul ! she protests against reading a single line of it ; should I, notwithstanding, meet with any *very* valuable instructions, any particular good recipe for making a female deceiver, I shall certainly communicate it to her directly.”

“ You are really too kind to her ! ” cried Somerset, laughing ; “ I have no apprehension, however, of her profiting by such lessons.”

Mrs. Denbigh now moved towards the door to depart, and Clarentine, hastening down upon the first summons, was detained by Somerset a moment at the door to enquire after her health, and then handed into the chaise, which immediately drove away.

Mrs. Denbigh, affecting more eagerness than she really felt, opened the packet as soon as she was seated, and began reading immediately ; whilst Clarentine had recourse to a book she had the day before put into one of the chaise pockets.

The first among these curious manuscripts which Mrs. Denbigh chose to select, was Mrs. Castleton’s own letter. The early part of it, containing the bitterest general accusations against her *friend*, she read very quietly ; but when she came to particulars—such as the story of young Godfrey’s disappointment, and the subsequent elopement with Eltham, she could

contain herself no longer.—“Merciful powers!” exclaimed she, with a mixture in her countenance of risibility and dismay, “Eltham might well despise this unhappy woman: might well caution you against her! why she jilted another man first, and then ran away with him to Scotland before he was nineteen!”

Clarentine, less surprised than shocked, said, “It had been well for Mrs. Hertford, if, in this treacherous and abominable *friend*, she had met with a mind as honourable as Mr. Eltham’s: I am persuaded *he* would never have revealed this anecdote.”

Mrs. Denbigh went on reading, and Clarentine again opened her book.

The journal of Mrs. Hertford’s foreign adventures, as well in Switzerland as in Italy, she had no patience to get through, nor did it appear that Somerset himself had; for one of the last sheets having accidentally been touched by the hot sealing wax, had adhered together, and remained unopened.

Turning next to Mrs. Hertford’s correspondence, one of the first paragraphs she met with was the following.

“Eltham, as I had reason to believe, is finally dismissed. I was sorry, as no other rival to the *guardian* appeared, to part with him; but he was a constant basilisk to my sight: I loathe and justly dread him more than any man upon earth. My feelings with regard to Somerset are those of indifference: with regard to him they amount to abhorrence.”

“So then,” cried Mrs. Denbigh, interrupting herself, “poor Eltham was sacrificed to this detestable woman! She seems to have held you by a wire, and to have guided you all, at her own pleasure, like so many puppets!”

Then resuming her lecture, she thus went on.—

“Whether Clarentine is *vain* or not, I am unequal to deciding; but that she is *proud* a thousand instances.

ces have tended to prove. Upon that pride I have worked; and by teaching her to think Somerset prefers me, yet at my *solicitation* (that was not the *exact* word I used, though) would renounce his own attachment to restore happiness to her, I have raised such a storm of indignation in her mind, that, after a very critical conversation, she ended by telling me, Somerset was become to her *an object of horror!* I truly believe it; and truly believe also, they are now divided for life! If he addresses her hereafter with unusual softness, she will attribute it to *compassion*; should he accidentally neglect her, she will impute it to *contempt*; when gay, she will believe he is *triumphant*; when serious, she will conclude he is *perplexed*. In no one situation of mind can she now ever behold him with ease or confidence."

Here Mrs. Denbigh, angrily replacing the letter in its cover, exclaimed, "I can go no further! This is less a *woman* than a *fiend!* No doubt what I have now been reading is the part Mr. Somerset so indignantly declared *his blood boiled at*—is the part that led him so fearfully to apprehend you suspected him of *vanity* and *presumption!*—Good God! how has she deceived me from the first moment I knew her! So thoughtless and undesigning in appearance, so mischievous and unprincipled in nature!—'Tis strange—'tis wondrous strange!"

Clarentine to all this was utterly silent; to have attempted any defence of Mrs. Hertford would have been preposterous—to aggravate her errors would have been unmerciful: she therefore sat a neutral auditor of Mrs. Denbigh's exclamations, and felt relieved, when, sickened of the subject, she, at length, voluntarily changed it.

Late in the evening the travellers arrived safely at Hampstead, and proceeded immediately to the house of Mr. Lenham.

That gentleman's reception of them was cordial

and cheerful ; Mrs. Barclay's, in her way, was friendly ; and her daughter's, as usual, blunt and indifferent.

After the customary compliments and congratulations were over, Clarentine, who dreaded herself, to ask any questions relative to Mrs. Hertford, was by no means sorry, however, to hear Mrs. Denbigh enquire of Mr. Lenham where she was.

"At her uncle's house in town," replied he,

"She is going to Bath soon," cried Miss Barclay.

"To Bath?"

"Yes ; she complains of her health, and says the waters have been prescribed to her."

"*Lethean waters* they should be," said Mrs. Denbigh, in a low voice to Clarentine.

"I suspect," returned Clarentine, smiling, "she would be perfectly content to resign those to us."

The change since the morning, which Somerset now observed in the behaviour of Clarentine ; the returning sweetness with which she treated him ; the timid sensibility that unconsciously betrayed itself in her fine eyes whenever they met his, and the conciliating gentleness of her voice as often as she ventured to address him, filled him at once with hopes so flattering, and gratitude so unbounded, that, all animation and vivacity, he conversed with a gaiety and spirit which infused cheerfulness into the whole party, and made the evening appear to Clarentine one of the happiest, though one of the shortest, she had ever known.

When Mrs Denbigh arose to depart, and had taken leave of the rest of the company, approaching Clarentine, whose thanks for her late kindness were as warm as they were sincere, she took her hand, and pressing it affectionately between her own, said, "Do not talk to me of thanks, dearest girl, but of courage to support your loss : I know not how to part from you, for to me you have proved a compa-

nion so invaluable and so attaching, I dread the frightful solitude to which I am now returning.

Clarentine, equally gratified and affected by this speech, promised with the utmost alacrity, since they still resided so near, although they were no longer under the same roof, to make her visits frequent and long, and to spend as much of her time with her as she wished.

She then attended her to the door, whither they were accompanied by Somerset, who was to escort Mrs. Denbigh home, and who, as she descended the steps, held out his hand to Clarentine, and said with a half smile, "Will you not, my sweet friend, bestow one word of consolation at parting upon your second fellow traveller?"

"No," replied she, cheerfully, "for if he finds the separation very irksome, he need not doubt the pleasure we shall all have in seeing him as often as he can come to us." So saying, she gave him her hand, which, with blessings and thanks, he pressed to his lips, and then flew after Mrs. Denbigh.

The pleasure with which Clarentine now revisited her former apartment, and again beheld so many objects that reminded her of the happy time when Somerset and she (upon the same friendly terms to which they appeared to be returning) seemed to have no wish so earnest as that of mutually serving and pleasing each other, was lively and unrestrained. Every doubt of his sincerity removed; convinced almost to a certainty of his love, and assured she had nothing more to apprehend from her insidious rival, she surveyed all the different testimonies of his faithful affection with the same grateful exultation she had first accepted them: and, at length, retired to bed in a state of contentment arising nearly to felicity.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CLARENTINE had been settled once more at her venerable guardian's near a fortnight, when, soon after breakfast one morning, as she was sitting alone in her own room, another letter was brought to her from Sophia.

MISS DELMINGTON.

Delmington-House, February.

"I have strange things to tell you, dearest Clarentine—so strange, that half doubting the possibility of their being real *myself*, I am almost afraid *you* will doubt it entirely. One moment, eager to come to the point, the next, frightened and ashamed, I know not how in the world to *begin*, and as for *finishing*, really believe I must leave that to the unmoved and tranquil Harriet. Dear, she does stroll about the house with an air so provokingly calm and at her ease, I could almost beat her! Why is not every body as distracted and restless as I am? My mother's kind and anxious face is the only one in the family I can look at with any patience: dear Edgar is not here, or else he would, perhaps, sympathise in my perturbations; at least, I am sure he would not appear so indifferent. I cannot bear indifference just now—if I dared I would rather *pinch* people than suffer them to retain the slightest symptoms of it!"

"Must I not now, however, endeavour to begin my story? You will otherwise *pinch me* when we meet, I suppose. Well, then, take the following strange (there is no other term for it) relation.

"We have lived here, as well since the departure of Mr. Somerset as before his arrival, in extreme good humour with each other, visiting or visited

every day, dancing or playing every evening, and—*bref*—in high spirits and perfect amity.

“ On a sudden, however, lo and behold ! a few days ago, while with Emma, I was sitting *thrumming* upon our old harpsichord in the parlour, the door opened, and in walked——you shall guess who when you hear the rest.

“ How d’ye-does and very wells, and thank-yes, and speeches over on both sides, I quitted my seat, and taking my work, placed myself at the window, and tried to start one of the usual conversations concerning sunshine and rain, wind and calm ; for to speak the truth, my companion’s looks and countenance perplexed me a little, and taught me, though I scarce knew why, to apprehend something extraordinary was coming : these amusing topics, however, had no effect upon him, and every five minutes there ensued a profound and embarrassing pause.

“ Mercy, thought I, this whimsical wretch is always alarming me ! What am I to expect now ?”

“ He kept me not long in suspense—but in a short time, despatching poor Emma upon some bootless errand, (I wonder what right people have to take such liberties with my sister !) approached me as I still pretended to be immensely busy, and seating himself at my side, would have taken my hand : I drew it back ; and though I did not speak, looked, I believe a little dismayed, for presently he cried ‘ why is my lovely friend thus silent and thus frigid ? She takes from me all courage to begin the subject upon which I came purposely to address her : dearest Sophia,’ added he, (my unfortunate little round face teaches every body to be familiar with me) ‘ speak to me—tell me I may open to you my heart, and that you will deign to hear its secrets with indulgence !’

“ What, more secrets ?” cried I, endeavouring to

rally, I thought I had penetrated all yours long ago.'

'O, no,' cried he again, and almost forcibly snatching my hand, 'you know not yet what a capacious heart it is—how many secrets it can contain, nor how nearly its present feelings relate to yourself.'

"I looked up, I looked down, I coloured, I turned pale; in short, I was so conscious of having the direct appearance of what at that moment I certainly was—a fool—that unable to keep my seat, knowing that the man's piercing eyes were fixed upon my face the whole time, I hastily arose and made an attempt to run out of the room: it was but an attempt, however, for instantly pursuing me, he once more caught my hand as I was opening the door, and never parted with me till not only *his* own, but *my* poor secret was revealed also.

"Can you conjecture what this double mystery was, Clarentine? No, you say. Why then, fancy you see us both seated again at that memorable window; I still looking silly—he saucy, and I am afraid a little secure—and attend to the sequel.

"One of the first things he asked me, and almost in as plain terms as I now repeat it, was—'Can you love me, dearest Sophia?'

"I did not answer like poor Kate—'I cannot tell,' but my look of indecision, and his own straight forward enquiry, I fancy reminded him of that scene, for he presently added with a smile—'If thou canst love me, take me: if not, to say to thee—that I shall die, 'tis true—but for thy love, by the Lord, no; and yet I love thee too.'—Ay, dear Sophia, more than after my late disappointment, I believe it possible I ever could love again. Your's is the exact character I ought to form a connexion with: I know you to be amiable, I have experienced that you can be generous, and to all those with whom you are allied by the ties of nature, I see that you can be af-

fectionate. I will not, however, deceive you, Sophia ; I will not tell you that I feel for you that extravagant and impetuous passion I felt for your fascinating cousin ; but I admire the excellence of your understanding, I delight in the gaiety of your conversation, I love the goodness and sincerity of your disposition, and the graces of your animated and enchanting little countenance have half turned my head ! —I cannot be happy *without* you, and *with* you, I may not only be happy *myself*, but prove the means of rendering *you* so likewise.—Be mine, then, dearest Sophia ! complete your work, and as you began, so establish my recovery.'

"There were things in this speech, you will allow, that could not be very flattering to my vanity, but in favour of its openness and manly honesty I forgave all the rest. I shall not tell you, however, whether I sent him away to *hang himself*, or whether I at length granted the permission he so earnestly solicited, of being allowed to apply to my mother : such secrets never should be told ; but this, (and I write it with almost as much incredulous amazement as you will read it) this I *must* tell you—the momentous YES, that is to decide our future destiny, we are mutually to utter—on *Tuesday se'n-night* !—Heugh ! the very idea takes away my breath !

"O, dearest Clarentine, thoughtless and inconsiderate as we both are now that we are upon the edge of the precipice, I tremble to think of all the absurdities and follies we may both commit !—My mother tells me he is bent upon carrying me to London this very spring : I wished—you know how eagerly—to go with lady Julia ; but dread nothing so much as entering upon a scene so new, with a companion, who, greatly as I shall love, it is impossible, however, I can look up to with the deference I should to a more experienced guide. The indulgence which the sweetness of his temper promises me, I almost

fear, and the means of dissipation which will be offered me, I start at, from the terror of abusing. I have not your moderation, dear Clarentine, nor half your native love of tranquillity. I shall become an odious little fluttering coquette during my youth, and degenerate at last into a gossiping old card-player—no, I shall *not* though, now I think of it, for I hate cards: ay, but perhaps your abominable London may teach me to like them; are *you* become a gambler yet?

* * * *

“ Give me joy, my own Clarentine, give me joy, if you love me!—It has just been determined, that instead of going to London to figure away in all the new-fangled frippery of an upstart fine lady, in *a house of her own, and a coach of her own*, and all the etceteras that would infallibly have turned my giddy brain, I am this year, while we are in town, to reside with a relation of his, a Mrs. Germaine, who is to hold my *leading-strings*, and preserve me (if she can) from exposing myself! I am enchanted at this plan, for now I can answer for one half of my conduct, if somebody else will have the goodness to answer for the other half; to support the whole burden myself would have been too much.

“ I feel so easy and so light since this scheme has been agreed upon, that I am convinced my *presentiments* were ominous! I should certainly have run wild, got into debt, caused half a dozen duels, and ended by being sent home in disgrace!

“ My dearest mother, in conjunction with Lord Welwyn, procured for me this happy release from myself! What sort of a person Mrs. Germaine is, whether young or old, I do not know; all I have to hope is, that she will hold the reins tolerably tight, and keep us both in good order. Would my mother could accompany me; or, at least, that we could

have succeeded in delaying this formidable ceremony till I had it in my power to congratulate myself on feeling a little wiser; both the one and the other, however, are impossible: *she* cannot, at present, quit Delmington, and *he* protests, that if he allowed me time to become one atom more prudent or more circumspect, he should grow afraid of me!

* * * *

“ O this Mrs. Germaine, I dare say, is a good sort of a woman after all. Lady Julia has just been here, and tells me she is to be presented by her, and to go every where with her whilst she is in London. Dear, how people can be so immensely obliging and convenient as to take charge of all the unruly rustics that offer themselves to their care! It must often be heavy work; with me, perhaps, she will find it too *light* work. It will be very shocking if I should—but it is a thousand to one if I do not some times break out of bounds: I know that I shall have such an encouraging example in my companion, that nothing less than a miracle can withhold me from following it.

“ You see, Clarentine, now I feel safe, I grow saucy again.

“ Lord Welwyn’s time for setting out is not yet exactly fixed, but I have great reason to hope we shall all take our flight from hence pretty nearly at the same moment; Harriet and Edgar are both to be of the party; the first will reside with Lady Julia, and my dear brother is to have lodgings in our neighbourhood.

“ Talking of brothers, by the way, do not let me be so unnatural as to omit telling you that we have heard very lately from poor Frederick, who writes with great cheerfulness, has again been promoted, and gives us strong reason to hope we shall see him once more in the course of the autumn.

“ Mrs. Harrington, Heaven be praised! is down in Lincolnshire, and has there spent the whole winter.

My mother has written to her an account of the *hows* and the *ands*, that is to say, of all our late proceedings, but has yet received no answer. I have a notion she will not be much delighted ; she has rather a horror of a certain gentleman, and would sooner admit any body than him, I believe, to the honour of becoming her relation. What is to be done, however ? I cannot persuade him to ask for her consent, do all I will ; and her displeasure he only laughs at. Horrid undutiful !

“ Well, but now, my beloved Clarentine, I must bid you farewell. Write to me ; scold me, if in this letter I have shewn too much levity ; give me your prayers and your good wishes, and if you have any pity in your nature, bestow it all on *Tuesday se'nnight* upon your frightened, but most tenderly affectionate,

“ SOPHIA DELMINGTON.”

“ Give you my good wishes, dearest girl ? ” cried Clarentine, when she had read this letter. “ Ah, may heaven only grant that your happiness as a wife prove proportioned to your merit as a daughter, a sister, and a friend, and whose is the felicity that will be more deservedly perfect.”

Then sitting down immediately to answer her, while her mind was yet wholly engrossed by the subject, she wrote a letter of congratulation the most affectionate and the most cordial, and enclosing in it a shorter one upon the same occasion to Lady Delmington, sent them both by return of post.

Scarcely had she concluded this grateful task, when she was summoned down stairs to a gentleman, who, the maid told her, was just come in with Captain Somerset.

The name of Somerset was sufficient, and indifferent who his companion might be, Clarentine hastened down without delay.

As she approached the parlour door, she distin-

guished, talking with all his accustomed vivacity, the voice of Mr. Manners, and when she opened it, beheld him walking up and down the room arm in arm with his friend.

They both eagerly approached her the instant she appeared, and the first compliments over, Mr. Manners delivered to her a note from his sister, who, he informed her was in town as well as his mother, but had not had it in her power to wait upon her for reasons which her billet would explain.

Clarentine immediately opened it, and found in it these words—

TO MISS DELMINGTON.

“ We came to town last night, my dear Miss Delmington, and I am already impatient to see you ; the most horrible cold I ever had in my life, however, prevents my stirring beyond the threshold, and will probably confine me for many days. My mother joins with me therefore in requesting, if you are not better engaged, that you will have the charity to come and dine with us. My brother will bring us your answer, and should it be favourable, our carriage shall call for you at three o’clock. I remain,

“ Dear Miss Delmington,

“ Ever affectionately yours,

“ LOUISA MANNERS.”

Albemarle-street, February 16.

“ I accept your sister’s invitation,” said Clarentine, folding up the note and addressing Mr. Manners, “ with the utmost pleasure, and will certainly be ready at the hour she appoints.”

“ I thank you in her name,” cried he, “ and will now gallop back to announce the success of my embassy. Somerset,” added he, “ do you return with me ? ”

"No ; I am going to pay a visit to Mrs. Denbigh."

"Mrs. Denbigh ? aye, true, and I ought to do the same ; I have not time to-day though, but give my respects to her, and tell her I shall take the earliest opportunity of throwing myself at her feet and repairing my present omission."

He then made his bow to Clarentine, and mounting his horse, hastened back to Albemarle-street.

Though scarce a day had passed since her return from Bath, during the course of which Clarentine had not seen, and even for hours conversed with Somerset, this was the first time she had ever found herself alone with him. The hints Mrs. Denbigh had dropped of his anxious desire to come to an explanation had half-frightened and made her cautiously avoid all private conversation ; it was not, therefore, without extreme embarrassment she now perceived that almost every chance of escaping it was at an end. Mrs. Barclay and her daughter were both in town ; Mr. Lenham was engaged with his young pupils, and Somerset, forgetting his intended visit, seemed by the thoughtfulness of his looks, to be meditating how he should begin. Clarentine could not bear thus passively to await the result of that deliberation, and determining to check all explanation that was preceded by a solemnity so awful, threw on her cloak, which happened to be in the room, and saying it was yet early enough to allow of her deferring to dress herself another hour, proposed accompanying him to Mrs. Denbigh's.

Somerset, suspecting her motive, appeared a little hurt at this constant eagerness to repress every attempt he had made to speak to her apart : pitying her evident confusion, however, and knowing her to be incapable of affectation, he was too delicate to detain her by compulsion, and therefore, with whatever reluctance, suffered her to quit the room, and silently followed her.

They walked on some time, Clarentine compelling herself to talk upon indifferent subjects ; he, absent and grave, scarcely knowing what he said, when, unwilling wholly to lose so favourable an opportunity, he at length interrupted her, and cried, " It would perhaps be selfish, perceiving how sedulously you seek to deny me the indulgence of a private audience, were I, with a view of terminating my own suspense, to force upon you what I have to say : but will you, Miss Delmington, consent to receive a letter from me, and may I venture to hope you will answer it ! "

Clarentine, grateful to him for having adopted an expedient that would save her from so much painful embarrassment, most readily replied in the affirmative, and felt half tempted to thank him for his considerate forbearance.

On their arrival at Mrs. Denbigh's, they found her at home reading a letter she had just received from Mrs. Westbury. It contained intelligence of Mrs. Hertford's arrival at Bath, and of her having been introduced to her by the gallant Mr. Lea, who, in quality of *cicesbeo*, attended her wherever she went.

" Further," continued Mrs. Denbigh, " to the honour of my poor friend's heart, though to the disgrace of her judgment be it known, she is as completely deceived in this artful woman as we all were. She writes concerning her in the most favourable terms, and at the same time that she thinks it necessary to condole with me upon the loss we must have sustained by her departure, congratulates herself upon having made so valuable an acquisition to her own society."

To this speech neither Clarentine nor Somerset made any answer ; the name of Mrs. Hertford was almost equally hateful to them both, and their wish to change a conversation of which she was the object, led them instantly to start another subject.

"I have had letters also this morning," said Clarentine, with a smile, "and letters that prove you, Madam, to be so infallible a prophetess, that henceforward I shall be more than ever afraid of your penetration."

Mrs. Denbigh begged her to explain herself—

"Have you forgot, then," resumed Clarentine— "your prediction relative to my friend Sophia?"

Mrs. Denbigh, deceived by this speech, as Clarentine had upon a former occasion been by one of Somerset's, immediately said, "Is she married?"

"Not yet; but the *formidable ceremony*, as she justly calls it, is to take place on Tuesday se'nnight."

"I am rejoiced to hear it," cried Mrs. Denbigh, "and rejoiced also to think we are likely so soon to have her in this part of the world: I long to see her; for a more rational, unaffected creature I am persuaded does not exist. Coquetry is now so much the fashion, that there are a thousand modern Misses, without half her real merit, who would have thought it extremely pretty to have kept poor Eltham a year or two in suspense, by way of revenge for not having been the *first* object of his attachment."

"Dear Madam," cried Clarentine, with some earnestness, "what an opinion you have of the unfortunate girls of the present day!"

"Nay, do not undertake their defence, my dear: *their cause includes not yours*, for I am convinced that when once you knew your own mind, you would not keep a deserving man in doubt a moment."

Conscious how ill she must, just then, appear to merit such a compliment, Clarentine blushed, and cast down her eyes; and Somerset strolled to the window, at which he remained till the conversation took a different turn.

In a short time she arose to go, and attended by Somerset, who, however, took leave of her at Mr. Lenham's door, walked home.

At the hour mentioned by Miss Manners, the carriage came for her, and conveyed her to Albemarle street.

The fair invalid received her with much cordiality, and though impatient under illness and extremely out of spirits, exerted herself to make the day pass off to her friendly visitor cheerfully and agreeably. Somerset was the only guest there except herself; and he was more gay and animated than she had seen him since the night of their return from Bath. A party was formed for the opera the ensuing Saturday, if Miss Manners was by that time sufficiently recovered to venture out; and at ten o'clock Clarentine took her leave.

CHAPTER XXV.

EARLY next morning, Somerset's letter arrived. Clarentine, though prepared to receive it, and in very little doubt as to its contents, opened it with great agitation, and read as follows:

TO MISS DELMINGTON.

Clifford-street, Feb. 17.

"Too long, my amiable friend, have I studied your guileless and gentle nature to be tempted for one instant to accuse you of ungenerously wishing to trifle with the feelings and happiness of another. You have evidently sought to avoid giving me any opportunity of unburthening to you my heart; you have convinced me, that to persevere in attempting it in person would distress and embarrass you: but, at the same time, having permitted me to address you by letter, you have proved to me that your reserve was not the effect of insensibility to my inquietude, or of any design to prolong it. I bless and thank you with

the warmest gratitude for this soothing conviction, and now hasten to the subject that led me to solicit your attention.

“ It can—I think it can, be no new information to my gentle correspondent, that the heart of her devoted Somerset has been wholly hers almost from the first hour he saw her on his return from his last voyage. Bringing back with him the sweet remembrance of what in childhood he had known her; impatient once again to behold the lovely, the undisguised and youthful friend he had then quitted, he arrived prepared for the impression he was to receive, and unarmed to resist her power over his heart. Oh, my Clarentine, as I again surveyed you, as with looks of sweetness and confidence you addressed me, called me your friend, allowed me the indulgence of hourly and daily seeing you, how did the visions, which even in absence I had cherished, strengthen and increase! Often, when harassed and fatigued by the dangers of my profession, often had I said to myself, “ What a consolatory recompense perhaps awaits me on my return! Clarentine Delmington, the dear, the ingenuous Clarentine, when next I see her, will from an interesting and attaching child, be grown into a fascinating woman. Retired as was the situation in which I left her, unless the fortunate Edgar has succeeded in conciliating her affection, there is yet a chance of my finding her disengaged. Oh, if such should be the case; if after all my toils, my long exile, and the hardships incident to a sailor’s career, I should in her meet with a reward—a friend—a mistress—what would be my happiness! ”

“ These flattering illusions, however, were but of short duration. The distant, and to me, inexplicable coldness that suddenly took place of the condescension with which, on my first arrival, you had treated me, checked the presumption with which I had indulged them, and taught me, though I had

not the courage long to fly your society, at least to conceal my sentiments, and never to reveal to any my disappointment. That coldness, originating in the artifices of a woman whose very recollection is abhorrent to me, I mean not, however, to complain of; it is at length sufficiently explained; and relieved from the insupportable apprehension of having myself caused is by some undesigned offence, I now perceive with joy that it has wholly ceased, and that my friend seems permanently retrieved.

“ Oh yet, then, my Clarentine—beloved from infancy, first and dearest object of my heart!—oh yet, then, realise those delightful visions!—destroy not again the fair prospect your own sweetness has raised: prove not to me that, in venturing once more to cherish the hope of your becoming mine, I err too vainly to be forgiven! but accept my vows, and with the noble candour, the generosity that has ever distinguished you, tell me, that you think me not unworthy of adding yet another, and a more tender title to that of guardian, lover, and friend!

“ WILLIAM SOMERSET.”

Clarentine wept over this letter with mingled sensations of gratitude and joy, and determined by the speed with which she answered it, to prove to its beloved and generous writer the high sense she had of his disinterested attachment, and the sincere and reciprocal affection of her heart.

TO CAPT. SOMERSET.

“ My eyes are yet blinded by the tears your letter has drawn from me: they were tears, however, not of sorrow, but of admiration and thankfulness. Somerset, my noble minded, and I will add, *dear* Somerset, I am yours. My hand I now give you, and my heart I long since lost all power to withhold from you.

“ C. D.”

In less than an hour after it had been despatched, this billet brought the warm-hearted and enraptured Somerset to pour forth his fervent acknowledgments at the feet of its fair and ingenuous writer. She received him in her own apartment—in that closet to which he had so long been denied admittance, and with looks of timidity and consciousness, with alternate smiles and blushes, listened to his ardent protestations, and frankly confirmed the avowal which his letter had irresistibly torn from her.

Insensible to the progress of time, they had spent near three hours together, and Somerset thought not of retiring, nor had Clarentine the courage to send him away, till, at length, they were interrupted by a summons to the dining parlour. She then entreated him to go back to town, fearing that the privacy of their interview would occasion some disagreeable observations from the Barclays, which she well knew would in his presence disconcert her much more cruelly than if they were wholly addressed to herself. He obeyed her without hesitation, though not without reluctance, and having obtained permission to wait upon her again the next morning, took his leave in the tenderest and most grateful manner.

Hastening down stairs the instant he was gone, on entering the parlour she found the whole family already assembled and seated at table. She made a confused apology for being so late, and then taking her usual place without daring to raise her eyes, began her dinner in silent embarrassment, apprehensive every moment of being interrogated, and unable to determine what excuse she should make for herself.

Miss Barclay, who from the time she first walked in had never looked at any other object, in a very few minutes fully realised her fears.

“Has not Captain Somerset been with you all the

morning, Miss Delmington?" cried she—"Pray why did'nt he come in to dinner?"

Clarentine, though she expected something blunt, was yet by no means prepared for a question quite so direct, and knew so little how to answer it, that before she could speak Miss Barclay had time to add, "There has been a gentleman here since breakfast, a Mr. Manners, enquiring for you; but thinking it would be pity to interrupt so snug a conversation, I bid the maid tell him you was particularly engaged with Captain Somerset, and could not see him."

Clarentine coloured, and looked as she really felt, extremely provoked, whilst Mr. Lenham, with some severity, said, "And by what authority, Lucy, do you allow yourself to deliver such messages in Miss Delmington's name without her concurrence?"

"Lord! uncle, I thought it was but doing as one would be done by." Mrs. Barclay laughed, but neither Mr. Lenham nor Clarentine, though almost equally indignant, chose to make any reply.

In the evening their party was reinforced by the addition of Mrs. Denbigh, to whom Clarentine open and unreserved, took an opportunity of communicating what had passed in the morning. That lady, warmly interested in all that concerned her, and entertaining of Somerset an opinion the most honourable, congratulated her with the truest affection upon the happy termination of her late anxiety, and uttered the kindest wishes for her future and lasting felicity.

Somerset himself, the next day, announced the same intelligence to Mr. Lenham, and was heard with equal, if not yet greater satisfaction. Attached to him more as a father than a tutor, the worth and excellence of his nature had been known to him even from his boyish days; formed to cultivate and value the blessings of select-friendship and domestic socie-

ty, Mr. Lenham was thoroughly assured there was no other species of happiness his heart was so well fitted to enjoy, and no woman upon earth, who from the similarity of her taste and pursuits, was so perfectly adapted to his character, as the modest and retired Clarentine. The connexion he had once apprehended he was upon the point of forming with Mrs. Hertford had always given him pain; less because he at that time harboured any unfavourable idea of her, than because he had discovered the apparently hopeless attachment of his young ward, and grieved to observe what ravages that attachment was making upon her peace. He thought himself bound in honour, however, not to betray a secret he had thus clandestinely penetrated, and confining alike his regret and his suspicions to his own breast, forbore all attempts to serve the one, from his reluctance to injure the other. But now that the real character of Mrs. Hertford was known to him, and all competition was therefore at an end, he hesitated not in declaring the cordial preference he had always felt disposed to give Clarentine, and the implicit reliance with which he depended upon the goodness of her heart, and the firmness of her principles.

From the moment this attachment became known in the family, the extraordinary license with which Miss Barclay permitted herself to animadvert and make sneering comments upon every look as well as action of Clarentine's, rendered the house so extremely disagreeable to her, that had she been influenced by no other motive, she would have found it difficult to resist the urgency with which Somerset implored her to become his without further delay—“ My probation,” said he, half smiling, “ has surely been sufficiently long, dearest Clarentine, and my courtship, though *indirect*, has also, I think, been of a duration which in conscience you cannot wish to protract. What more could we discover in each

other's characters, after an acquaintance of so many years, were we now with any view of that sort to defer our union even for a twelvemonth? I am no dissembler; the good and the bad in my disposition, are equally penetrable, and all your vigilance and delay will succeed in detecting in me nothing more than an increase perhaps of love, and a certain increase of impatience."

Clarentine laughed at this remonstrance, but at the same time assured him that, far from desiring to raise unnecessary difficulties, after having once freely avowed to him the sentiments of her heart, she wished only to defer their marriage till she had written to Lady Delmington, and received, what she doubted not to obtain, her sanction and consent.

"Ah, rather then, let *me* write to her!" cried Somerset with warmth; "I distrust the earnestness with which you will plead for me; suffer me therefore to discuss the subject with her myself."

Clarentine, by no means sorry to resign to him so awkward a task, made no opposition to this proposal, but retiring with him to Mr. Lenham's study, he there wrote a short letter, which, though she criticised extremely, he permitted her not to alter, but the instant it was concluded, sealed and immediately despatched.

Soon after breakfast the next morning, she received the following note from Miss Manners.

TO MISS DELMINGTON.

"I have at length persuaded my mother that I may be permitted to venture to the Opera to-night without any danger; the truth is, she does not know that the villainous apothecary who attends me insists upon bleeding me again this morning: he talks of my being feverish, and makes horrid wry faces at me. I shall not attend to all his professional cant, how-

ever, but sick or well, dead or alive, am determined to submit to this irksome restraint no longer.

"We have borrowed a lady's box for this evening, and are to have it entirely to ourselves. The pit is now become too vulgar to sit in, at least, so I am told. Young Westbury, who is now in town, and called here yesterday, protests that on Tuesday last he stood during the whole of the second dance next a good old nurse, or something of that sort, who finding the wind blew cold from the stage, turned the train of her gown over her shoulders, and sat with it so, very composedly till the curtain dropped!

"Come to us early, dear Miss Delmington, and make Captain Somerset send his carriage for you, as ours is never allowed (for fear it should *catch cold* and want *bleeding*) to go out in the morning when it has any duty to do at night.

"Adieu—your's ever,
"L. MANNERS."

Feb. 21st.

This *prudent* note Clarentine answered with some degree of irony, congratulating its fair writer upon the philosophical indifference she expressed concerning either life or death, and applauding her for that enthusiastic *passion for music* which led her thus to brave all danger for the sake of hearing a fine orchestra! She concluded, however, by promising punctually to fulfil her engagement.

Accordingly, at the proper time, attended by one of Somerset's servants, she drove in a hackney coach to Albemarle-street, preferring that conveyance to accepting his carriage.

Miss Manners ran out to meet her at the head of the stairs, ready dressed and in excellent spirits, but so dreadfully hoarse she could hardly make herself intelligible.

Clarentine shook her head at her with an expres-

sive smile, and calling her an *incorrigible racket*, proceeded forward to pay her compliments to her mother.

In a very short time they were rejoined by three gentlemen who were to escort them—Somerset, Mr. Manners, and young Westbury; and as soon as tea was over, all repaired to the Haymarket.

Their box was upon the second tier, and extremely near the stage, which—the Opera having been began some time before they entered—was already crowded with gentlemen who were standing at the side scenes, and whom in a few minutes Mr. Westbury, as anxious to display the graces of his person as themselves, went to join.

Mr. Manners then stationed himself behind Clarentine, and addressing her in a low voice, “Pray, Miss Delmington,” said he, “till what time did the important business you were transacting with Somerset the other morning engage you?”

Clarentine, extremely confused, answered, “I ought to have apologised to you sooner for the rude message you received, but I assure you it was not sent out by me, nor did I know you had called till after I went down to dinner.”

“And who was the kind friend that so seasonably undertook the task of removing all intruders?”

“I was very far,” answered Clarentine, “either from thinking the act itself a kind one, or you an intruder.”

Mr. Manners bowed, and was beginning again to speak, but with an archness in his looks which frightened her so much, that, turning hastily from him, she said, “I must not suffer you to talk to me now; we are going to have a song.”

At the end of the first act young Westbury returned to them, purposely to tell Clarentine he had just seen a friend of her's, who, when the Opera was over, he would bring round to her. “I have not

been able yet," added he, "to speak to him, for the stage is so full it's impossible to get at him ; but I am *sur de mon fait*, and determined not to let him go without having seen you."

"And who is this friend, Sir?" said Clarentine with great indifference.

"Mr. Lea, perhaps," cried Mr. Manners.

"O, for Heaven's sake, Mr. Westbury," cried his sister, "don't bring *him* here ! There is nobody upon earth I hate so much !"

"And yet," said Westbury, "the last time I was at your house whilst you remained at Bath, I met him there."

"That says nothing in his favour ; one's obliged to invite all sorts of people sometimes : I repeat it, therefore, he's my aversion, and if you bring him to us, I'll never forgive you."

"Westbury," cried Mr. Manners, "I'll go behind the scenes with you, and you shall shew me this friend of Miss Delmington's."

Westbury upon this took him by the arm, and they quitted the box together.

"My brother, I fancy," said Miss Manners, when they were gone, "felt by no means sorry that such an excuse was given him to exhibit *his* pretty person likewise. Pray, Captain Somerset, don't *you* wish to join them ?"

"Yes," answered he, smiling, "to serve you, and hasten the approach of Mr. Lea."

"O, don't talk to me of that man !"

"Then do not talk to me of leaving you."

"Dear, I thought I was doing you an immense favour, for I concluded you only staid with us from motives of politeness, and was longing the whole time to play the Narcissus among the rest of the *to-nish* Macaronies upon the stage."

"No, really, I have not any such ambition."

" You reserve yourself as a novelty then, to be admired in the coffee-room?"

" Yes," replied he, with a laugh, " you have now perfectly guessed it."

" Lord, how strangely you answer! I can make nothing of you, and so I leave it to Miss Delmington to take you in hand."

" I am glad," said Clarentine, " your dialogue is concluded, for as the curtain is now drawing up I shall wish to be permitted to listen to the singers."

Very little further was said till the end of the last dance, when Miss Manners, impatient to get to the coffee-room before Mr. Westbury could put his menace in execution, hurried them all out of the box, and besought her mother to lead towards it immediately.

In their way thither, the lobby being extremely crowded, Clarentine, fearing to be separated from her party, most gladly accepted Somerset's arm; whilst Mrs. and Miss Manners, less unused to such a bustle, proceeded composedly forward, appearing quite as much at their ease as if they had been in their own house.

Though slowly, and with difficulty, they had just reached the door of the coffee-room, and were upon the point of entering, when Clarentine, as she was drawing away her hand, and turning to thank Somerset for his assistance, beheld immediately behind her, walking arm in arm Mr. Eltham, and Sir Edgar Delmington!

Doubt and astonishment, not wholly unmixed with consternation, seized her at this sight, and bereft her of all power to advance. She changed colour, and again almost involuntarily catching hold of Somerset's arm, drew him back, and scarcely knowing what she said, whispered, " Let these gentlemen pass."

“What gentlemen?” cried he, but at the same instant looking round and perceiving who they were, he touched his hat to them, though not without himself undergoing a considerable alteration of countenance, and stopped to give them time, if they wished it, to speak.

Eltham was the first to make use of this opportunity. He quitted his companion, and, coming forward, gravely said, “I hope I have the honour of seeing you well, Miss Delmington?”

Clarentine only curtsied; and Sir Edgar now approaching her likewise, in an unsteady voice, and with a countenance that indicated the strongest emotion, repeated the same enquiry nearly in similar terms, and then attempted to express the pleasure so unexpected a meeting had given him; the words, however, died on his lips—he hesitated, stammered, and at length abruptly interrupting himself, said as he retreated, “I fear we detain you from your party, Madam?”

Clarentine, in whose affectionate heart the sight of this early friend had revived the remembrance of all their former intimacy, was struck with sorrow, on recovering from her first amazement, at the dejection of his looks and voice, and concerned to hear herself addressed by him with such chilling formality. Innocent and unreserved, she had forgot the cause which had separated them, and seeing him only in the light of a long absent brother—of one whom she had always loved, and still retained the truest regard for, she held out to him her hand, and, in a tone of the most conciliating kindness, said—“No, my dear Sir Edgar, you do *not* detain me: I stay because I am sincerely rejoiced to see you, and have a thousand questions to ask concerning your family. How did you leave Lady Delmington, and my dearest Sophia?”

Sir Edgar surprised, yet deeply affected by this

friendliness and cordiality, accepted her offered hand with gratitude, and bowing upon it as if to conceal his agitation, after a momentary pause, answered, "They were both well, I thank you, and would both, had they known the honour I should have of seeing you whilst in town, have made me the bearer of their most affectionate remembrances."

"What stay, Sir," cried Somerset, now addressing Eltham, "do you design to make in London?"

"We arrived," answered he, "late this evening, and return on Tuesday morning."

Just then Mr. Manners and young Westbury, as they were forcing themselves a passage through the crowd in their way to the coffee-room, perceived and joined them.

"Ah, Sir Edgar," cried the latter, familiarly addressing the evidently astonished Baronet, "you have anticipated me, I find; I had prepared Miss Delmington to accept a friend, and intended to have conducted you to her myself before she left her box, but you were off so quick after the curtain dropped I had no opportunity of speaking to you."

"I have not the honour, Sir," said Sir Edgar, gravely, "of knowing to whom I am indebted for such unmerited attention."

Somewhat abashed by this discouraging reply, yet determined, after all the parade with which he had boasted of their long acquaintance, not to suffer himself to be so easily repulsed, Westbury now said— "I had the pleasure, Sir, though I was not in the same college, of seeing you often at Oxford: my name is Westbury."

Sir Edgar, in answer to this interesting information, made a slight bow; and then turning to Clarentine, "If you will now proceed, Miss Delmington," said he, "we will do ourselves the honour of following you."

Clarentine immediately moved on, and finding

Mrs. and Miss Manners, when she entered, seated near the door, placed herself next them; Somerset and Sir Edgar remaining with her, the three other gentlemen strolling to the upper end of the room.

The mournful silence into which Sir Edgar now sunk, the melancholy expression of his countenance, and the fixed, yet unconscious attention with which he riveted his eyes upon her face, disconcerted and at the same time pained her so much, she scarcely knew how to look up, or in what manner to support any part in the conversation. Gaiety, at such a moment—seeing before her with every symptom of unhappiness a man she had so long known, and so long valued—it was impossible either to affect or feel: saddened upon such an occasion, or even thoughtful, in the presence of Somerset—of him to whom she had so lately avowed her attachment, and was so soon to be united—she dreaded to appear: distressed, therefore, most cruelly, and apprehensive of being observed, she sat confused and irresolute, not knowing how to speak with her usual composure, and reluctant to betray her real feelings.

Somerset was the first to perceive and pity her uneasiness. Too liberal and noble-minded to entertain any suspicions to her disadvantage, he imputed it at once to the true cause, compassion and friendship; and felt not for a single instant any other sensation towards his less fortunate rival than that of humane and generous sympathy. The depression so visible in that rival's countenance Somerset was, of all others, when he looked at Clarentine, and remembered what had been his own sufferings at the time he fancied her lost to him, the most likely to pardon. Her commiseration for him he honoured, and the undisguised and artless simplicity with which she had suffered her kindness towards him to appear, much as it might have irritated a distrustful or a selfish nature, he venerated and loved.

Anxious therefore to dissipate her embarrassment, and if possible to engage Sir Edgar's attention, he exerted himself in order to draw him into conversation, and started by turns every subject which he thought best calculated to interest him. Lady Julia he ventured not to name ; but he talked to him of his own family, of Madame d'Arzele, of his sister's approaching marriage, and of the pleasure with which Miss Delmington looked forward to her arrival in town. Sir Edgar, though he was not sensible of half the merit of this considerate civility, answered him with politeness, and made an attempt to appear more cheerful ; his success, however, was by no means adequate to the pain which the effort inflicted ; so little indeed did it answer to it, that Eltham, who in a short time again approached them, observing the sadness and despondency with which he still appeared to be oppressed, hastily moved towards him, and taking hold of his arm, said, in a low voice, yet with great earnestness, " Come away, Delmington, come away ! —you'll unman yourself if you stay here any longer ! "

Roused by this unexpected admonition, and but too well convinced of its propriety, Sir Edgar merely stopped to make his parting bow, and then with a look that claimed and excited all Clarentine's tenderest pity, suffered himself without opposition to be drawn away.

When they were gone—" Who is that dismal looking young man ?" cried Miss Manners ; " his countenance and figure interest me in his behalf, though he has really made me almost as vapourish as himself."

Clarentine, with a sigh, replied he was a relation of hers, and his name was Delmington—

" Well, I protest I thought so," resumed Miss Manners, " there is so strong a family resemblance between you, that the whole time he stood here I had

got it into my head he was somehow or other connected with you. But pray do tell me, what is the matter with him?"

Somerset, who saw the confusion to which this question gave rise, spared Clarentine the pain of answering it by saying with a half smile, " Cannot Miss Manners, if indeed she suspects our friend of being unhappy, bestow upon him her good wishes and her compassion, without suffering her curiosity to precede her benevolence?"

" O dear, if his history is a secret, I don't desire to penetrate it! my pity is heartily at his service, and I am only sorry he has not something more consolatory to depend on."

" He has, I hope," thought Clarentine, " the most certain of all dependencies, rectitude and good principles!"

Mrs. Manners's carriage being now announced, her son hastened forward to offer his assistance in conducting Clarentine to it, whilst his sister put herself under the care of Somerset, and Mr. Westbury had the condescension to give his hand to her mother.

It had been previously determined that Clarentine was to sleep that night in Albemarle-street, and return the following day to Mr. Lenham's. Somerset therefore took leave of her at the coach door, after receiving an invitation from Mrs. Manners to breakfast the next morning.

Clarentine's mind, after this distressing interview, remained in a state of the utmost inquietude and agitation. Sophia's late letters, and the favourable accounts she had heard from time to time of Sir Edgar's amended spirits, had taught her to hope, as well for his own as the sake of Lady Julia, that the juvenile partiality he had felt for her had wholly given way to reason and absence. The deep and settled depression, however, she had with so much regret ob-

served in his appearance—his manners—his very voice, had destroyed all those expectations, and left her nothing but the afflicting consciousness of having, with whatever innocence, been the means of blasting all his youthful happiness. Soft and gentle as was her heart, this certainty was anguish to her; and she wept with bitterness over the fate of a man, whom, to have restored to peace and tranquillity, she would have sacrificed almost every personal gratification. Sincerely did she lament the unfortunate chance which had again brought them together and again revived, perhaps at the very time his laudable and vigorous efforts had succeeded in nearly eradicating her image from his mind, all his former sentiments. No vanity, no little ungenerous exultation mixed itself with these reflections: it was far from being a matter of triumph to her to think that she had been the cause of giving pain to any human being; much less to a friend who, like Edgar, had she been permitted to accept, at the time he proposed himself to her, before her heart became sensible in favour of another, she would have given her hand to with gratitude, and have made it the sole study of her life to have repaid him for his disinterested preference. Her love for him as a child had been animated and sincere, and though, as she grew up, the frequent changes she witnessed in his temper, perplexing as they were to her till the ill chosen moment of his declaration, had often piqued and offended her, yet the habit she was in of regarding him with confidence, and treating him with intimacy, assured her that in contributing to his felicity she should greatly have promoted her own. That time, however, was passed; and equal to the wretchedness he experienced would now have been hers, had she, to unite herself to him, been compelled to renounce Somerset!

“Alas! then, dear Edgar,” cried she, “what remains for me to do, but, with my pity, to offer up

for you my most fervent prayers for the restoration, through some other channel, of that happiness, which, even if I had still the power to confer, I could no longer participate; but which the sweet and amiable creature to whom you are about to be connected is equally formed to bestow, and disposed to share!—Heaven, then, bless and teach you how to estimate her value, and return her innocent affection!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

AT breakfast the next morning, when she met Somerset, her languor, and the heaviness of her eyes alarmed and grieved him: he had no opportunity of speaking to her alone, earnestly as he wished it; but hearing she had been prevailed upon to remain with her friends till the succeeding day, put into her hands, just before he went home to dress for dinner, the following billet written with a pencil at the window:

"In my way hither this morning, I accidentally met with Mr. Lenham:—Anxious to hear some account of his unhappy friend, I took him with me into a coffee-house, where we had a long and interesting conversation. Be not so painfully distressed, my beloved Clarentine:—poor Delmington, great as was his agitation on first seeing you, still possesses a fortitude and manly strength of mind, which will enable him, after this trying interview, to meet you upon every succeeding one with firmness and courage. He knew not, till Eltham, informed of it by some third person at the Opera, announced it to him, the happiness I have in view; the intelligence, at first, startled and confounded him; but upon the whole, has been of infinite service in determining him more resolutely

than ever to banish from his mind every sentiment for you that partakes of more than fraternal warmth. Revive then, sweetest Clarentine, and suffer not the soft compassion you feel for him, at a moment like the present, to supersede all the other affections of your heart! The deep concern with which your own sorrow has filled me entitles me to nearly as much pity as you have bestowed upon—I had almost called him—the enviable Edgar!"

With such a motive to overcome her dejection as the fear of making her generous Somerset unhappy, Clarentine found it no difficult task, when he again appeared, to meet him with all her wonted cheerfulness and composure. The caution contained in his note, delicate as it was, put her upon her guard, and proved to her, that however distant from his mind all jealous mistrust now was, he could not answer for the continuance of his serenity should her anxiety and melancholy continue also.

The *third person* alluded to as Eltham's informant at the Opera, she had not a doubt was Mr. Manners. His raillery and former archness had almost wholly ceased, and been replaced by a respectful quietness, or a general vivacity, which, as it had never, except once the night before, (upon occasion of his abrupt dismission the morning he had called at Hampstead) given way to his natural love of tormenting, convinced her he was perfectly acquainted with the present situation of her affairs.

Early the next morning, Clarentine would have returned home, but Miss Manners, encouraged by her first success, besought her so earnestly to defer her departure till evening, that at length she consented: and with yet less difficulty, a quarter of an hour afterwards, agreed to accompany her, attended by her brother, to the Shakspeare Gallery: Somerset was to be engaged the greatest part of the day upon some professional business; and Mrs. Manners, expecting visitors, declined being of their party.

Soon after breakfast therefore they set out on foot, the weather being favourable, and had nearly reached the middle of Pall-Mall, when, coming out of a bookseller's shop alone, and with a countenance, which, though not more animated, was infinitely less perturbed than when Clarentine had last seen him, they were met, and immediately recognised by Sir Edgar Delmington.

Changing colour as he addressed them, yet struggling to appear at his ease, he stopped a few minutes to make some general enquiries, and was then taking his leave; but Miss Manners, whispering Clarentine, said—"Why don't you ask him to go with us?"

"Shall I tell him you desire it?" returned she, smiling.

"Yes, if you like it; I have no sort of objection."

"Why then, Sir Edgar," cried Clarentine, turning towards him with the same look of cheerfulness—"I am commissioned to request, in the name of this young lady, whom I beg to introduce to you—Miss Manners—that you will favour us with your attendance to the Shakspeare Gallery."

"Most willingly;" replied he, brightening at the proposal, "I ventured not to enquire whither you were going, but be assured, my desire of accompanying you preceded the honour you have done me in permitting it."

They then all moved on, Miss Manners saying to Clarentine as they advanced—"I think your solemn friend improves; that was really a much prettier speech than I expected from him."

"Probably," returned Clarentine, "your goodness to him put him into spirits."

Miss Manners made some slight answer to this, which her companion had not time to attend to, for just then they arrived at the door of the Gallery.

After they had wandered about the room some time, Sir Edgar, approaching Clarentine, who, with a catalogue in her hand, was sitting upon a form op-

posite one of the great pictures, reading the scene from whence its subject was taken, placed himself next her, and said, "Has Miss Delmington any message, any letter to send into Devonshire? We leave town to-morrow."

"No letter," replied she, "for I wrote very lately; but a thousand kind messages, to our dear Sophia in particular."

Then pausing a moment, and thinking there would be a species of affectation in so manifestly avoiding to mention Lady Julia, she presently added, "And to Lady Julia Leyburne likewise, when you see her."

Sir Edgar suppressed a sigh, and, after a short silence, said, "Have you written to Lady Julia also lately? or shall I be the first to announce to her the reports that are circulated concerning you?"

Clarentine blushed, but affecting to speak with gaiety, replied, "Till Lady Julia can repay me by some similar intelligence, she might accuse me of designing indirectly to reproach her for her cruelty, were I to speak too early of my own"—She hesitated for a word that would with propriety express her meaning, but finding none that she liked, blushed yet deeper than before, and heartily repented having gone so far.

Sir Edgar, fancying he had interpreted that meaning, supplied the deficiency for her. "Of your own tenderness?" said he—"Was not that what you would have added? Oh, dearest Miss Delmington, may that tenderness, deservedly as I hope it is bestowed, be but as fervently, as gratefully returned, as it must involuntarily be envied"—he stopped, his eyes glistened; Clarentine, too, felt her's fill with tears, and was compelled to turn away her head: recovering more firmness, however, he at length added—"Pardon me, most gentle, most beloved of human beings!—This is not language in which I ought now—I ought ever, distinct as were our sentiments, to

have addressed you ! It is the last time I will permit myself to hold it ; but your own softness, and the angelic compassion you have shewn me, drew it from me ! When next we meet, to utter it would be criminal : suffer me, therefore, as a relief to my bursting heart, this one—this only—”

“ No, no,” interrupted Clarentine, though not with anger, yet with seriousness. “ You have said more already than, situated as we mutually are, I ought to have allowed. From this moment, Sir Edgar, we see each other, we converse, but as brother and as sister, or we see each other, we converse, no more !”

“ I submit to your terms,” cried he ; “ they are those which, from this day forward, I meant strictly to observe. Too long, dear Clarentine, have I been inured to the painful task of self-restraint, to distrust the success with which I shall in future practise it. I have known every degree of wretchedness, borne every species of torment, which doubt, the apprehension of detection, and the pangs of disappointment, could inflict—borne them, though not with unremitting, yet with general fortitude ! If, at so early a period I could do this—suffer, yet dissemble —smile, yet be in anguish—ah, need you fear the courage I shall now exert !—A youth of sorrow should make an old age of philosophy : who knows,” added he, forcing a melancholy smile, “ what your Edgar may one day become ?”

“ He will become,” cried Clarentine, turning towards him with earnestness and (no one being by) giving him her hand—“ he will become, I doubt not, as happy as with worth, honour, and integrity, such as he possesses, he deserves to be ! You have a disposition, dear Edgar, formed for domestic felicity—cultivate your natural love for it ; attach yourself to those you live with, and above all, cherish and be kind to the affectionate and lovely partner whom you are destined to spend your life with.”

“Dearest Clarentine,” cried he, penetrated by her kindness, and pressing to his bosom the hand he held, “how does this friendship, and the interest concerning me you so generously express, soothe and console me! Yes, best of women! I will be all your excellent heart can wish! She who has been chosen for me, I will seek to deserve and render happy: the duties, whether public or private, that may in the course of my future life be imposed upon me, I will endeavour to fulfil with exactitude and spirit: you shall be my secret guide, the unknown spring of all my actions: your friendly smile shall reward, your approbation stimulate my exertions; and whatever may be my fate, or my success, Clarentine never shall have cause to blush for the voluntary errors of the friend of her infancy—the imperfect copy, but the faithful reverencer of her virtues?”

He then, seeing her too much affected to be able to speak, kissed her hand, with an expression that equally partook of tenderness and respect, and hastened out of the room.

Though cheered by his fair promises, Clarentine was yet so sensibly touched by all that had passed, that she remained after he had left her, motionless and in tears, forgetting where she was, till roused by the re-entrance, from an adjoining room, of Mr. and Miss Manners.

“What! is our young Sir Dolorous gone?” cried the latter, gaily approaching her—Clarentine rising and walking towards one of the pictures, in a low voice answered in the affirmative, without venturing to look round.

Miss Manners, perfectly content, thought of him no more, but the next minute began talking of other subjects, criticising the dress and appearance of every new comer, admiring the different paintings, yet scarcely looking at any one of them two minutes together, forming schemes of pleasure for the next

day, reproaching Clarentine for not staying with them longer, and wondering what her mother would find to say to all the stupid *quizzes* who were that morning to call upon her.

This thoughtless rattle relieved Clarentine, and gave her time to recover her usual tranquillity. They remained in the Gallery till a late hour, Miss Manners protesting she would not go home whilst there was any chance of finding the *quizzes* there, and then walked back to Albemarle-street.

Somerset, released from his morning engagement, called in soon after dinner, and when Clarentine took her leave, would not be denied the satisfaction of attending her home.

In their way to Hampstead, she acknowledged to him, with the ingenuous frankness that characterised her disposition, the meeting of the morning, and repeated to him the honourable assurances Sir Edgar had given her, as well with regard to his future conduct, as to the sentiments with which hereafter he designed to meet her.

Somerset, with a heart so well formed to feel the value of this confidence and candour, expressed his gratitude in the most animated terms, and joined with her in uttering the sincerest good wishes for the returning peace of mind of one whom he knew was so justly dear to her.

“As for Mr. Eltham,” added he, with a smile, “the pride and resentment which your rejection occasioned, has, I plainly perceive, cured him completely. Sir Edgar’s self-conquest is solely the result of effort and principle—*his* is the effect of indignation. He speaks of you with extreme respect, but at the same time with a certain air of *hauteur* which amuses me extremely, and which, as it proved to me that his angry heart was but a secondary sufferer in the business, amused me also without scruple.”

“I have some design,” cried Clarentine, with af-

fected gravity, "to make an experiment of this kind upon *you*; I should be curious to know, upon being discarded, which would predominate in *your* mind, anger or sorrow."

"Oh, my beloved Clarentine," cried he, snatching her hand, "start not such an idea to my affrighted imagination! I cannot bear it even in raillery!"

Clarentine drew away her hand, and with a laugh, said—"If you are so susceptible of a little irony, Mr. Somerset, what would you have done had you had such a gay creature as Sophia to contend with?"

"I should have been driven to distraction; or rather, as a lover, at least; I never should have contended with her at all. The mildness and sensibility of my Clarentine suit far better with my temper than would that misplaced wit, which sports with the affections of the heart, and makes a jest even of the most serious feelings."

"Ah," cried Clarentine earnestly, "if such is the levity of nature you ascribe to Sophia, you wrong her cruelly! In the first place, she neither aspires, nor in fact possesses any claim to the character of a *wit*; and in the next, her disposition is kindness and benevolence itself. Hers is all harmless and innocent pleasure, resulting from real gaiety of heart, and as totally unmixed with acrimony, as it is free from the most distant intention of offending."

"I allow her every excellence," said Somerset, "you attribute to her, and yet," continued he, smiling, "if I had been seriously attached to her, and she had treated me with the careless volatility with which, whilst at Delmington, I often saw her treat Mr. Eltham, I much doubt whether, like him, I could with patience have endured it."

"Yours is not a character," said Clarentine, "which like his would have called that volatility forth, and therefore upon you it would never have been tried; it suits Mr. Eltham, however, exactly, and by amus-

ing, will contribute to attach him with far more constancy than a disposition less airy and less spirited could have any chance of doing."

She then gave a different turn to the conversation, and soon after they stopped at Mr. Lenham's.

The answer which Somerset expected with so much impatience from Lady Delmington, arrived at his house in town early on the fifth day after he had written to her. He was at Hampstead when it was delivered, but having left orders that whatever letters came for him in his absence should immediately be brought after him, one of his servants rode thither with it full speed, and alighted at Mr. Lenham's gate just as he and Clarentine were walking up to it, on their return from a morning visit they had been making to Mrs. Denbigh.

Joy, hope, and rapture, animated the eyes of Somerset, and brightened his whole countenance as he received and looked at the welcome post-mark of this most ardently desired letter. Clarentine observed his emotion, and by a quick glance at the direction, observing likewise whose was the hand that had written it, silently withdrew her arm from within his, and all consciousness and emotion in her turn, walked hastily into the house.

In a few minutes, Somerset, with unabated ecstasy, followed her. She had taken refuge in Mr. Lenham's study, which at that hour of the day, he being engaged with his pupils, was almost always empty, and was there traversing the floor with agitated steps, when he entered and flew to her—

"Oh, now!" cried he, seizing her hand and pressing it with fervour to his lips, "Oh, now, best beloved of my heart, I may indeed call you my own, my ever destined Clarentine! All suspenses at an end, all doubts, all fears eternally removed, you are mine for life, irrevocably and solely mine! Read, dearest of creatures, read and confirm to me by one

kind look the transporting contents of this enchanting letter! You said that upon these contents my fate should depend; ratify that promise, and tell me you are all my own!"

Gently disengaging herself from his hold, deeply blushing, yet attempting to laugh at his earnestness and unwonted impetuosity, Clarentine took the letter, and moving towards a chair, sat down to read it, Somerset placing himself next her.

The consent for which Lady Delmington had been solicited was granted, she found, with the readiest alacrity, and the good wishes and felicitations to both parties which followed it were cordial and animated. The letter, however, was short though satisfactory, and ingeniously as Clarentine sought to gain time by prolonging its perusal, she was at length compelled to own she had concluded it, and obliged to answer his eager supplications—

"What can I say to you, Mr. Somerset?" cried she, hesitating and embarrassed. "You do not suspect me of designing to recal the word I so lately passed? Why then press me to speak? what would you have me add?"

"That you will now," answered he, with warmth, "receive my faith immediately; no one obstacle stands between us, but wholly on your decision and on your mercy rests my hopes!"

Clarentine, abashed and hesitating, still hung back, and still evaded fixing any positive time, till Somerset, no longer able to command his impatience, named himself so very early a period, that, rather than permit him, by her silence, to conclude the proposal met with her concurrence, she was forced herself to decide upon the last day of the following week.

This concession gained, he then left her, all gratitude and delight, and hastened back to town in order immediately to set on foot the necessary preparations for their marriage.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THREE days after this arrangement had been made, Clarentine was much surprised again to receive a letter from Sophia—

TO MISS DELMINGTON.

Delmington-House, February 27.

“ When I sent off my last letter, I concluded that as we were to meet so soon, nothing was likely to occur that could make me desirous of writing again ; I was mistaken, however, as upon a thousand occasions has happened to me before, and I feel that I must either once more relieve my mind by a little *literary prosing*, or be accessory myself to its going wild.

“ Our two wanderers, Edgar and his friend, returned to us yesterday ; Heaven only knows *why* they ever left us ; Mr. Eltham said it was to make some indispensible arrangements previous to a certain event, and Edgar assured us it was merely to bear him company. It is as well to *seem* credulous when people take pains to deceive you, and so, when they are by, I appear all faith and trust ; but to speak honestly, my own private opinion is, that they went for no other purpose than—*to go to the Opera !*—Strange that two rational creatures should travel so many miles upon such an errand ! So it is, however, and to the opera they both hastened the very first night of their arrival.

“ There is a mild and gentle being in the world, whom you have occasionally heard me mention by the name of Clarentine Delmington, who not an hundred years ago, was an object of nearly equal adoration to both these operatical adventurers. With this fair creature, this perfect semblance of *white-robed*

innocence—speaking soft and smiling sweet—they met, on their way to some room or other adjoining to the theatre. Their feelings upon the occasion were rather awkward, since, in addition to the emotion which her sudden appearance excited, they had the pangs of envy to contend with; for this lovely damsel, so relentless and so inexorable unto *them*, was leaning with looks of cordial satisfaction, upon the arm of another man, which other man they had but too much reason to suspect was their favoured successor!

“O, what a treat it would have been to me to have seen this matchless triumvirate at the moment their eyes first met! I except poor Edgar, however; it would have given me nothing but concern to have witnessed the pain which he, I doubt not, felt: but as for Messrs. Eltham and Somerset, their countenances I think must have been delightful. To have *pityed* either would have been a farce; one was upon the point of marriage with the chosen mistress of his heart—and the other, we must all allow, was in a yet more enviable situation, being engaged to such a *Phœnix* as your Sophia. Besides, Eltham, when he mentioned the circumstance, did it with an air so easy and unembarrassed, that I venture to flatter myself it made but little impression upon his mind: he met me not afterwards with one atom less vivacity or good humour, and appears not in the slightest degree more thoughtful or more depressed. All therefore that *his* aspect testified, I imagine, was surprise, mixed perhaps with a trifling expression of offended self-consequence. The poor gentleman is still a little splenetic, I assure you, when that horrible word *rejection* comes across his mind! How soon he means cordially to forgive you I know not; he seems more disposed towards it, however, than I once thought he ever would be; and therefore I am not without hopes, that when we all meet I shall persuade him to take

you by the hand and ask you to be friends with him : pray do not refuse him, if you still mean to continue friends with me.

“ As for Edgar (who, by the way, my mother has no suspicion of your having seen) he never speaks of you without the extremest veneration and gratitude. We have had a long conference together concerning you, and he tells me that your behaviour to him was truly that of an angel ! Dearest girl, how do I love you for your sweetness and sympathy to this best of brothers ! It has calmed his agitated mind, and been balm to his wounded heart. You have promised him, he says, your future friendship, your *sisterly* friendship ; you wept over the too faithful picture he drew of his long sufferings ; you spoke peace and affection to him—and with the kindest advice, uttered the most benevolent good wishes ! Excellent and considerate Clarentine ! never can I sufficiently thank you for a softness so well timed, a tenderness that has been so beneficial !

“ Rejoicing that this first meeting is over, he now assures me, that, although he can never see you with indifference, he shall henceforward see you without any of those tumultuous sensations which at that moment so nearly overpowered him. I sincerely hope his prediction will be verified ; but, meanwhile, cannot help feeling rather disposed to bear him a little malice for having hitherto so completely deceived me : I really thought him thoroughly recovered, for his behaviour to Lady Julia this whole winter has uniformly been so attentive, her own gentleness leads him always to address her with such softness, and he feels for her, I am convinced, so much interest and regard, that it seem to me impossible he should at the same time harbour such an ardent affection for another object. I suppose, however, *his* heart is very *capacious* as well as Mr. Eltham’s ; I am certain, at least, it is very difficult to read.

“ I say nothing to you, my beloved Clarentine, of the letter my mother lately received from Mr. Somerset. The idea of next Tuesday puts me in such a fright for myself, I have no courage to speak of the approaching fright which likewise awaits you. Lady Julia is so generous as to laugh at my dismay ; her own turn, however, will come next September, and then I hope to have gained spirits to retaliate the favour *in kind*. ”

“ Mrs. Harrington has at length vouchsafed to answer my mother’s letter, and to answer it, also, with far greater civility to our friend Eltham than I expected. His near relationship to Lord Welwyn, whose title she respects infinitely more than his character ; and his splendid fortune, which beyond even title itself she reveres, induce her to silence every objection she would otherwise, I am persuaded, make to the man himself, and courteously to congratulate my mother upon Sophia’s *good luck*. ”

“ Where shall you be, dearest Clarentine, the eighth of next month ? On that day we all expect to be in town, Lord Welwyn having consented, at his daughter’s earnest request and mine, to set out at the same time Mr. Eltham and I do. Impatient as I shall be to see you, let me hope you will not, before then, have left the neighbourhood of London to ramble to any very formidable distance with your new pilot ; tell him I shall be extremely angry with him if he steers his lovely prize into any remote harbour, and that he may expect a whole fleet to be sent after him to win her back again. ”

“ Do I talk good seaman’s language ? Ask him, dear Clarentine, and when he has answered you, cast your eyes once more upon this paper, and give me due credit for the sincerity with which I subscribe myself, ”

“ Your’s most affectionately, and truly,
“ S. DELMINGTON.”

Previous to the receipt of this letter, it had been agreed between Clarentine and Somerset, that immediately on their marriage they should go down to his seat in Northamptonshire. This plan they still adhered to, determining, however, to make their absence much shorter than was originally intended, for the pleasure of meeting sooner with the friends whom they expected, and on whose account they now decided to hasten back to town before the expiration of a week.

Their deliberation upon this subject was scarcely concluded, when Miss Barclay entered followed by one of the maids, who, with a broad grin upon her face, delivered to Clarentine a card saying, "Mrs. Manners's footman, Miss, has just brought that for you."

Clarentine, wondering at her risibility, held out her hand for it and read aloud—

MRS. MANNERS,
At Home,
Thursday, March 4th,
9 o'clock.

"At home?" repeated the unpractised Clarentine, "and what then?"

"Lord," exclaimed Miss Barclay, contemptuously, "don't you understand what then? Why, she means to invite you to some party on Thursday."

"Aye, Miss, it's true enough," cried the maid, who, accustomed to be treated by Miss Barclay with extreme familiarity, made no scruple when she was present, of behaving with equal freedom herself, "for I asked the servant about it, and he told me Madam was to have a grand rout that day. For my part, I thought, maybe she had been to have come here, and so, not being well, had sent you that, to let you know she should stay *at home*."

Then, still laughing heartily at the *odd conceit*, she left the room.

Clarentine now turning to Somerset, said—"I am ashamed of betraying such rustic ignorance, but do pray tell me, is this really meant as an invitation?"

"Yes, really," answered he smiling.

"And are the guests never told *what* they are invited to? Whether to a ball, a card party, or a concert?"

"Dear, no;" cried Miss Barclay, "its taken for granted one hears all that before one goes, among one's acquaintance."

"But what," resumed Clarentine, "are those to do, who like me have no acquaintance?"

"Why take their chance, and prepare themselves accordingly."

"How prepare themselves?"

"Lord, why by carrying money in their pockets that they may be ready to play if asked, and by putting on light shoes that they may be equally ready to dance."

"Thank you," cried Clarentine, bowing, "these instructions may be extremely useful to me."

"You mean to go then?" said Somerset.

"If I knew any lady I could go with, I should certainly."

"Oh, if it depends only upon that," cried Miss Barclay, "I should like to accompany you of all things."

Clarentine looked a little disconcerted, and Somerset hastily rising, walked to the chimney.

Miss Barclay thus went on—"I'll tell you what, Miss Delmington, you have but to write a bit of a note to Miss Manners, to say there's a young lady lives with you who wishes to be of your party, and Captain Somerset can send it to her when he goes back to town."

"My dear Miss Barclay," said Clarentine mildly,

"you would not wish, I am sure, any more than myself, to make your appearance at a great assembly, such as I presume this will be, without some married lady?"

"Perhaps Mrs. Denbigh may have been invited; I'll step to her house and ask her."

Then without waiting for that encouragement she saw it was hopeless to expect, she ran up stairs for her cloak, and set out alone for Mrs. Denbigh's.

Clarentine and Somerset remained, after she was gone, looking at each other for some minutes in silent, yet half-laughing amazement, at an ignorance of the world, and a forwardness at once so conceited and so vulgar.

Somerset was the first who at length spoke—

"Let not this strange proposal distress you, my Clarentine," said he, "I shall see Manners this evening, and will commission him to state the case to his mother and sister, and prepare them to expect your intruding companion."

"Wait, however, till she returns," said Clarentine, "perhaps Mrs. Denbigh may not be going, and then I shall have an excellent excuse for declining the invitation myself."

In less than a quarter of an hour Miss Barclay came back, calling out triumphantly as she opened the parlour door, "Well, Mrs. Denbigh is asked, sure enough, and means to go; so now therefore, Miss Delmington, you have nothing to do but to write the note I told you of. Let me consider," added she, sitting down and looking very thoughtful, "next Thursday, isn't it? Ay, I shall have time enough to get my new gown made, and Hannah Gibson promised to pin me up a cap whenever I wanted one."

"And who is Hannah Gibson," enquired Clarentine.

“ Why, she was a school-fellow of mine, but her father died about a year ago, and left her so poor, she has bound herself ’prentice to a milliner in Cranbourn-alley. You can’t imagine what tasty caps I have seen of her making ; all those that are hung in the shop window are mostly what she did up, and every body admires them excessively. If you like, I’ll ask her to contrive one for you.”

“ I am much obliged to you,” said Clarentine, smiling, “ but I beg you will not trouble her.”

“ Dear, she’s very good natured, and would think it no trouble, I dare say ; however, we have time enough to think about that—do you write the note now.”

“ There is no necessity to write at all : Mr. Somerset has undertaken to carry a verbal message to town, which will do quite as well.”

Miss Barclay, perfectly satisfied with this arrangement, then left them, and flew to the head of the kitchen stairs to order one of the maids to run immediately for the mantua-maker.

Somerset, who could not help being amused by the whole affair, and particularly by the obliging offer that had been made to Clarentine of applying in her behalf to the ingenious Hannah Gibson, staid only to remonstrate with her upon having rejected such assistance, and mounting his horse, which at that moment was brought to the door, rode back to town.

During breakfast the next morning, Clarentine received a very polite note from Mrs. and Miss Manners, expressive of the pleasure it would give them to see her friend, and inclosing for her a card similar to the one that had been sent the day before, which they requested she would deliver in their names.

Miss Barclay, whose rage to be introduced into

fashionable society was as unbounded as her qualifications to shine in it were deficient, received this invitation with equal pride and rapture. In her own opinion secure henceforward of moving only in the most elegant circles, she enjoyed already in anticipation the envy which amongst her less fortunate acquaintance she should excite, and the wonder which she doubted not to inspire: even the tasty Hannah Gibson she now began to think unworthy of the honour of adorning her; and recollecting accidentally to have heard the fashions of Cranbourn-alley a little derided, resolved to bespeak every part of her head-dress upon this important occasion from the more modish magazines that so abundantly supply the neighbourhood of Tavistock-street.

With this determination, as soon as breakfast was over, she walked alone to town, carrying with her, in addition to what remained of her own allowance, a painfully-extorted half-guinea, the reluctant produce of her mother's bounty.

On her return, about half an hour before dinner was announced, not finding Clarentine in the parlour, she ran up to her room to impart to her the success of her expedition.

“Lord, how comfortable you are sitting here,” cried she, as she flung open the door—“as for me, I hav’nt a leg to stand upon; I do believe I hav’nt walked less than eight miles: I have made some excellent bargains, however, and have bought the sweetest necklace and ear-rings you ever saw! Only look,” added she, taking a little box out of her pocket, and eagerly displaying its contents, “what a beautiful colour these beads are; I got them next door to where I went about my cap—do you like them?”

“I dare say,” answered Clarentine evasively, “they will be very much admired; but what success had you with regard to your cap?”

"O dear, I didn't buy any, for they told me it would be much better to choose something that I could pin on myself in the way of a fancy turban ; so I fixed upon a spangled gauze, and to-morrow I am to have some very smart ornaments sent home to wear with it."

Clarentine was beginning to congratulate her upon having been able so well to suit her taste, when hastily interrupting her, Miss Barclay said, "Now I know you must have bought a great many new things against your wedding ; do let me see some of them : what do you intend to be married in ?"

"Indeed," said Clarentine, colouring and half smiling, "I have not yet thought about it."

"No ?—well that's the oddest thing I ever heard of. In your place I should already have settled every individual article I meant to wear ; to be sure, however, you intend to go to church in white ?"

To this, Clarentine, not very desirous of dwelling upon the subject, made some slight, careless answer, and then added, "Did you see any body in town whom you knew ?"

"Yes, I saw Mrs. Hertford driving at an immense rate along Pall-Mall in a dashing new chariot : I wonder whose it was, and why she never let me know she was come home."

"Ah," thought Clarentine, "there is no chance, I hope, of her making any advances towards a renewal of her former intimacy in this house, whilst Somerset visits at it so often, and I continue to inhabit it."

They were now called down to dinner, and an end was put for that time to Miss Barclay's interrogations.

The next day, however, Clarentine had all the fatigue to undergo of examining and praising the tasteless finery she had bespoke, and which (consist-

ing of gaudy ribands, shewy flowers, and coloured gauzes) arrived, to the great joy of the impatient expectant, early in the course of the morning. Her discourse, throughout the whole afternoon, turned upon nothing but the most fashionable method of arranging these various decorations ; and so completely did she even surfeit her mother upon the subject, indifferent as she generally was to what was passing, that, at length, exerting an unusual degree of authority, she called the maid, and in spite of all Miss Lucy's indignant remonstrances, very peremptorily ordered her to bundle all the *tawdry trumpery* into a band-box together, and *hoist* with it up stairs directly.

Disagreeable to Clarentine as were these contentions, it was yet a relief to her upon the present occasion to be exempted from any further consultations ; and the more so, as a few minutes after the removal took place, Somerset appeared at the gate, and entered the house.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE hour at length arrived so ardently desired by Miss Barclay, and so gladly hailed by Clarentine likewise, (who sickened of the very name of an assembly, was anxious to have it over) when they were informed the carriage was at the door which was to convey them to Albemarle-street ; they stopped for Mrs. Denbigh in their way, and then proceeded immediately to town.

On their arrival at Mrs. Manners's, Somerset

hearing their names announced, hastened out to meet them at the head of the stairs ; he reproached them for being so late (it was then considerably past ten o'clock), and directing them where to find Miss Manners, after they had spoken to her mother at the door, followed them across the room.

The reception that was given to Miss Barclay in favour of the persons she came with, was extremely polite, and did honour to the considerate good-nature with which Somerset had taken the trouble to prepare them for her introduction : the flaunting shewiness of her dress however, particularly when contrasted with that of her companion, which was all simplicity, appeared among the young people who surrounded Miss Manners to excite a mixture of surprise and ridicule. Some shrugged their shoulders with an air of cold contempt, whilst others, after staring at her from head to foot with the most steadfast curiosity, turned upon their heel with a half-stifled laugh, and tripped away to communicate their sarcastic observations to a different party.

To all this, fortunately for her, Miss Barclay, at the height of her ambition, self-satisfied and elated, was totally insensible ; careless what the women thought of her, she scarcely noticed any of them ; but at the approach of every fresh gentleman who addressed Somerset, her heart fluttered, her face assumed a complacent smile, and in the hope of exciting attention she instantly began a *giggling* sort of conversation with Clarentine, which lasted, with an affectation of infantine vivacity, till, one by one, they again retreated, and she was left only with the ladies.

Meanwhile Mrs. Denbigh, seeing them provided with seats and particularly attended to by Miss Manners, who, stationed next to Clarentine, scarcely spoke to any one else, consented, after some time, to sit

down to cards, and had just left them for that purpose, when Mr. Lea, smiling and bowing with all his wonted courtesy, approached them—

“This animal,” said Miss Manners, in a hasty whisper to Clarentine as he advanced, “has taken it into his head to marry since you saw him; I long to know which is his wife.”

Then turning to him—“How do you do, my dear Sir?” cried she; “I hope you have brought Mrs. Lea with you? In what part of the room am I to look for her?”

Mr. Lea, in answer to this, touched a lady’s elbow, who, with her back towards them, was conversing with a group of gentlemen at some distance, and on her turning half round said, “My dear, allow me, this is Miss Manners,” and taking her hand, he drew her towards them, and in the person of his wife, discovered to the half-petrified Clarentine, and the no less wondering Miss Barclay, the form and features of Mrs. Hertford!

“Lord!” exclaimed Lucy, abruptly addressing her, “is it you? Well, to be sure you have got over your disappointment pretty quick! How long have you been married? and when did you come to town?”

Mrs. Hertford, or rather Mrs. Lea, coloured, but made no answer to these blunt enquiries, contenting herself, after a formal curtsey to Miss Manners, who had risen at her approach, to bestow upon her late confidant a slight inclination of the head; and then moving away again, she renewed the conversation her husband had interrupted.

“Do you know the lady?” said Miss Manners in a low voice to Lucy.

“Dear, yes, Madam, I have known her ever so long, and I can’t imagine why she would not speak to me; it’s very impertinent, I must say, and I have

a monstrous mind to go and have a little conversation with her about it."

"No, no," cried Clarentine—"for Heaven's sake do not think of it!"

"What is it against which Miss Delmington is so earnestly remonstrating?" said Mr. Manners, who with Somerset just then walked up to them.

Clarentine, terrified, lest, in the hearing of Mr. Lea, who still kept his post near them, Miss Barclay should blunder out any untimely explanation, was upon the point of intreating her in a low voice to be careful of what she said, when she saw her suddenly start up, and as Mrs. Lea was crossing the room to sit down, follow, and place herself next her.

Miss Manners laughed, and leaning towards Clarentine said, "Is your friend going to quarrel with the poor bride?"

"I hope not; but indeed it's very possible; let me intreat you to go with me into the next room, for I could not bear to witness any scene of that sort."

"Dear! as I know so little of either of the parties, such a battle would entertain me extremely: however, I'll go wherever you like."

So saying she arose, and arm in arm they walked into the adjoining apartment.

Somerset and his friend followed them, and the former seizing the first opportunity of speaking to Clarentine unheard, said, with some anxiety—

"What drove you hither with such precipitation?"

She explained to him as briefly as she could her reasons, and then asked him whether he had yet seen or spoken to Mrs. Lea herself?

"No," answered he gravely, "nor do I wish it."

Miss Manners now addressing her brother said, "Have you been presented to Mr. Lea's pretty wife?"

"Yes; the happy bridegroom did me that honour yesterday: I met him whilst I was riding out, and he insisted upon my going home with him ~~solely~~ for that purpose."

"Well?"

"Well—I beheld, admired, bowed, and retreated."

"Did not you like her then?"

"I had more reason to like her than her poor erring booby of a mate, for at the same time that she treated him with the most ineffable contempt, she behaved to me with the utmost sweetness and complacency."

"With contempt already!" cried Miss Manners. "Good God, then why did she marry him?"

"Mr. Lea," answered her brother, drily, "is worth 1200*l.* per annum."

"And was that the best reason she had for accepting him?"

"Draw your own inferences from what you have heard," replied he; and turning away, he walked up to another party.

To Clarentine's infinite joy, Miss Barclay rejoined them no more till Mrs. Denbigh's game broke up, and Somerset's carriage, in which they were to return, was announced.

In their way to the outward room, whilst Mrs. Denbigh stopped a few minutes to take leave of some ladies of her acquaintance, Clarentine again perceived Mrs. Lea seated near the place where they were standing: she purposely avoided looking towards her, but hearing her own name mentioned, could not, with equal forbearance, resist giving some attention to what was passing.

The person to whom she was speaking was a young man, who with his eyes fixed upon Clarentine, seemed to have been earnestly enquiring who she was—

“Whatever she is now matters very little,” answered Mrs. Lea, in a half whisper, “since her rank and situation will in a few days be entirely changed.”

“Is she, then, going to be married?”

“Yes; she forms a brilliant connexion with a man of large fortune, whom, after using extremely ill for many months, she at length, in the failure of two others, (a young Faronet, and the nephew of an Earl,) condescends to accept.”

“She’s a beautiful creature.”

“Yes, a pretty sort of a girl, somewhat haughty and vain, however, but you animals contribute to spoil all these rural beauties by your unbounded flattery; they are not used to such fine things, poor souls, when they first creep out of their caves, and if you had any mercy you would moderate the doses a little, and be content to turn their heads by degrees, rather than set them a spinning all at once! As for little Delmington, her hopes were raised so high when she first left her native wilds, that it’s ten to one if she does not actually give herself great credit for having had the humility to stoop to any thing under a Duchess’s title! These misses all come flocking up to town with Lady Coventry’s success in their heads, and while their milkmaid-bloom lasts, feel so secure of triumph, that they neglect or mismanage, the first three months, more splendid opportunities than they ever obtained afterwards with the best laid plans in the world.”

“Who is it she marries?”

“Do you know Captain Somerset?”

“No.”

“That’s him standing yonder with Mr. Manners —He’s what grave and sage people call a worthy good creature, and what I call a fine young man, very easy to be duped however, very credulous, and very unsuspecting.”

"Is that," said Mrs. Lea's friend, with a significant smile, "what the lady particularly requires?"

"Exactly," answered she.

Though Clarentine, it will easily be supposed, lost many sentences of this charitable dialogue, she yet heard enough to tinge her cheeks with the deepest crimson, and to irritate her so extremely, that disdaining herself for having listened to so much, she now moved abruptly towards the door, and waited there alone till Mrs. Denbigh and Miss Barclay were ready to follow her.

During their ride home, Mrs. Denbigh, being fatigued, and Clarentine indignantly meditating upon what she had heard, Miss Barclay engrossed the conversation almost exclusively.

"Well, I declare," cried she, after they had proceeded some way, "if an angel from Heaven had come down a few weeks ago and told me Mrs. Hertford could ever have behaved to me as she did this evening, could ever have married such a sneaking, mean, disagreeable looking wretch as that nasty little Mr. Lea, I should not have believed it! She used to take such pains to persuade me of her love for somebody else, used to talk so disinterestedly about it, make such fine parading professions of regard for me—and then, all at once, to accept such an object merely for his money; look at me as if she had never seen me before, and treat me with such pride and negligence! To be sure it's a good lesson—and if ever in future I trust quite so much to people that speak me so fair, I shall wonder!"

"I am amazed to hear you talk of her thus," cried Mrs. Denbigh; "I saw you sitting together and apparently conversing so amicably, that I concluded you were upon the best terms imaginable."

"No such thing, though I can assure you, she was cunning enough to get me to return to her every one

of her letters before she went to Bath; and so as she has now lost all fear of me, and I never had any reason to fear her, we spoke out to one another pretty plainly! You may believe me or not as you will, but this I am sure of—she's a bad woman, and as artful and sly as a serpent!"

As neither Mrs. Denbigh nor Clarentine chose to undertake her defence, Miss Barclay, exulting in the persuasion that she had carried conviction to their minds, and been the first to stagger their good opinion of Mrs. Lea, went on in the same strain with such perfect self-complacency till the carriage stopped, that short as the ride had appeared to her whilst thus employed, she could scarcely believe the coachman had driven to the right house.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE following day, which was now the only one that remained previous to the most important one of Clarentine's life, Somerset, who spent the greatest part of it at Mr. Lenham's, being alone with her towards the evening, said—

" My Clarentine, I have been reflecting with regret upon the difficulties, which, at the distance that separates us, will prevent our seeing your beloved Madame d'Arzele as often as I know you would wish: can we fix upon no plan that might surmount these obstacles? would it be impossible to induce her to choose some habitation nearer to our own neighbourhood?"

“Attached as she is,” answered Clarentine, “to her present cheerful, yet quiet little mansion, I should think it almost cruel, great as would be the happiness I should derive from her society, to draw her from it, unless I knew of any other we could recommend as an equivalent for the one she would quit.”

“I confess,” resumed Somerset, “that at this moment I know of none such; but a very short time might enable me, with diligence and activity, to discover one the very counterpart of that she now resides in: at all events, we could with ease prevail upon her to spend a few months in town every year, by means of making a proportionate addition to the little income my generous Clarentine has hitherto spared her, and which, after this day, she will have invested me with the right of increasing.”

“Dear and noble Somerset!” cried Clarentine, holding out to him her hand, the tears starting into her eyes—“Who half so generous, so considerate as yourself! We will discuss this subject, however, just now, no further: I owe so much already to your disinterested liberality, that I cannot bear at present any additional weight of obligation. When Lord Welwyn comes to town, talk the matter over with him: it is right that before we attempt to remove from him such a neighbour he should be consulted: if he approves your plan, we will then devise together the means of obtaining her sanction to it.”

Somerset, subscribing unhesitatingly to this decision, now started a different topic, and remained with her till a late hour, talking over a variety of plans relating to their future way of life.

In addition to Mrs. Denbigh, whose attendance Clarentine herself requested, she was accompanied to church the next morning, at that young lady’s pressing solicitation, by Miss Barclay. Mr. Manners

gave her away, and the ceremony was performed by the worthy Mr. Lenham ; after which, the travelling chaise that had waited for them at the door being ordered to draw up, Somerset handed her into it, and instantly following her, they set out immediately for Northamptonshire.

On the ensuing Tuesday, without waiting for a summons, they returned to town, and, driving post, reached Clifford-street before the close of day. Clarentine, without loss of time, despatched a note to Sophia at Mrs. Germaine's, apprising her of their arrival, and intreating to know when she could see her.

The servant brought her back the following answer :

MRS. SOMERSET.

“ Come to me, dearest creature, after breakfast, to-morrow. A convenient head-ach will keep me at home, and alone, the whole morning, as Mrs. Germaine is going about the town with Lady Julia and Harriet to shew sights, and Eltham has promised to be of their party. They know nothing of your return, for I choose to have you entirely to myself the first three hours, and the expectation of seeing you might make them all take it into their heads to stay at home.

“ I write this in horrid haste ; just escaped from a drawing-room full of aunts and cousins, who have made my ears ring with congratulations, till they have almost stunned me. Adieu, dear Clarentine,

“ S. E.”

Somerset, to whom Clarentine, when she had read it, shewed this note, smiled as he gave it back into her hand, and said, “ It is so evident, my love, your

pretty friend wishes for no third person to be present on your first meeting, that I shall defer my visit to her till evening, and leave you to make your own at what hour suits you best in the morning. If I endeavour, however, when you return, to draw from you the secrets of so mysterious an interview, you must not be surprised: husbands, you know, are privileged to be curious, and the privacy of this appointment is such as to excite *my* curiosity very strongly."

"Are you aware," said Clarentine, with equal gaiety, "that by thus reminding me of your privileges you put me upon my guard, and teach me the necessity of being cautious? Whatever I may hear, I shall now come home so well prepared to dissemble, that all your interrogations will be useless."

At one o'clock the next day the carriage came to the door, and Clarentine getting into it, was driven to the house of Mrs. Germaine, in Portland Place.

She was shewn up stairs on her arrival, and left an instant alone in a dressing-room, the door of which, however, was the next moment thrown open, and Sophia, sparkling with joy and breathless with eagerness flew into her arms. "Who shall detain me," cried she, "when such a friend as this is here? They are all below still, my Clarentine; but hearing your carriage stop, before the servant could announce you, I rushed from them, at the hazard of breaking my neck, to see and to embrace you. There—do you hear? Harriet is now shrieking after me! begone, dear girl," added she, speaking from the landing place, "I told you before I could not go with you; I am engaged—I am busy."

Then hastily shutting the door, and fastening the bolt, she returned to Clarentine, and drew her towards a sofa, upon which she seated herself next her.

"Since you are thus unwilling, my dear Sophia," said Clarentine, apprehensively; "that our conference should be interrupted, I am very sorry I came so early. The carriage that brought me will infallibly betray us, for I gave no orders that it should drive off, and the party below must see it at the door."

"O no; I told one of the servants, as I ran through the hall, to dismiss it directly: besides, Eltham is gone out already, and he would have been the only one amongst them who could have known the likely."

"But why all these precautions, Sophia? Why so much secrecy? Have we any thing *very* important to discuss?"

"Perhaps not; but I don't choose to make you popular till I have exhausted all my store of family anecdotes. I am my own mistress now, Clarentine, or the deuce is in it! and as long as I can, I am determined to save you the mortification of being presented to Mrs. Germaine. Oh, she is the most wearisome, insipid person, by whom the world was ever surfeited! A frolicking Mrs. Barclay in higher life, without half her vulgar originality, however, and consequently without any of her coarse entertainment! I am amazed how Lord Welwyn could fix upon such a woman to be the guide of Lady Julia. She will racket the poor girl into a consumption in less than a month, if she goes on as she has begun."

"Have you, then, had time to go out much already?"

"O yes; we only arrived yesterday morning, and she dragged us, two hours afterwards, to a thousand different shops; made a large party for the evening of her's and Eltham's relations; proposed this pretty expedition for to-day; and takes us all out to dinner, and then to tea and cards, to-morrow."

“ Is this perturbed lady very young ? ”

“ No ; an emaciated, antique skeleton, worn out with dissipation and late hours ! ”

“ Dearest girl, what a comfortless house for you to reside in ! How long shall you be here ? ”

“ O, as short a time as possible, be assured. Eltham has no great veneration for his amiable aunt any more than myself, and therefore I hope we shall get out of town by the latter end of May.”

“ Alas ! poor Sophia ! Are you then to remain with her near three months ? ”

“ Indeed I fear so ; and, what is worse, in those three months she will have given me such a thorough distaste to London, that I fear I never shall be able to endure it again ! ”

“ Perhaps,” said Clarentine, smiling, “ there may be no harm in that : you had at one time formed such high expectations of it, that, had they been all realised, you might have become an absolute *Lady Townley*. ”

“ It is by no means improbable,” returned Sophia, “ and therefore if you will assist me with a few philosophical arguments, I will endeavour to reason myself into a belief that my being consigned to this odious old *flutterer* is a very fortunate circumstance.”

The subject was then changed, and Sophia, with her accustomed animation and good humour, was beginning to ask a thousand different questions, which she scarcely gave Clarentine time to answer, when hearing a quick step upon the stairs, she hastily said, with a look of vexation—

“ What now, I wonder, will those creatures linger at home all day ? ”

As she spoke, some one from without attempting to turn the lock, but finding it fastened, called out in a voice which they instantly knew to be that of

Eltham—"Sophia, will you not give me admittance?"

"Yes;" answered she, moving towards the door—"but who have you with you? Are the ladies gone?"

"They are; and I am come to know why you did not accompany them: pray don't keep me standing here."

"No, no; let him in for Heaven sake?" cried Clarentine, earnestly.

Sophia laughed, and in a low voice, said, "will you be very civil to him if he comes in?"

"Yes, certainly?"

"And will you, Eltham," resumed she, speaking louder, "be very civil to my companion if I allow you to join us?"

"Your companion!—Are you not alone then?"

"No; I have an exceeding pretty little *French milliner* shut up with me. Shall you like to see her?"

"Yes, yes; pretty or not pretty, open the door before I lose all patience."

Sophia did so; and Eltham hastily entered, saying, "what ridiculous fabrication"—but starting at sight of Clarentine, he stopped short, and bowing to her with an air of mingled gravity and surprise, "I beg your pardon, Madam," cried he, "I knew not that you were here."

"Nor did I intend," said Sophia, "you *should* know it; I had a great many things to talk over with her, and meant to have excluded all intruders the whole morning: since you *have* seen her, however, I insist upon it, Eltham, that you once for all throw aside those petrifying formal looks, and speak to her with the freedom and cheerfulness of an old acquaintance. There, go, and wish her joy on her marriage, and beg her to return the compliment."

Eltham, who could not forbear laughing, com-

plied, however, with the best grace he was able, and taking Clarentine's hand, which he bowed upon as he spoke, paid his compliments to her in terms equally unaffected and well-bred.

"This is as it should be," cried Sophia, who, with looks of pleasure, had attended to the little ceremony. "You have acquitted yourself perfectly well, Eltham, and I now give you notice that whilst we are in town, this dear creature, as often as I can prevail upon her to let it be so, is to make one in all our parties, and to live with us as much as it is in her power. It was highly necessary, therefore, you will allow, that all your sour faces should disappear, and that, cordially and sincerely, you should shake hands, and determine to meet as friends. You know the old ballad, Eltham?"

"Tom loved Mary passing well,
"But Mary she loved Harry."

Remember, however, that in future you are to love no other Mary than me; though you are to be civil to them all. Ay, and to the Harrys too?"

Then bringing to him his hat, which, on his entrance, he had thrown upon a table, she put it into his hand, and gently pushing him towards the door, added, "Now make us one of your best bows, good friend, and don't let me see you again till dinner."

"I will go, I think," said Eltham, laughing, "and pour my complaints into the sympathising ears of Captain Somerset, from whom, since I presume he is no better treated than myself, I have not any doubt of obtaining the utmost commiseration. Shall I," continued he, addressing Clarentine, "have any chance of finding him at home this morning?"

"I left him there, Sir," answered she, "when I came out."

"Don't you mean, then," said Sophia, "to keep your appointment with Mrs. Germaine and Lady Julia?"

"No, your brother is gone with them, and therefore I reserve myself for some other occasion." He then bade them good morning, and left the room.

Clarentine, who could not but applaud the part her rattling but sensible little friend had acted, and who sincerely rejoiced in the certainty she now had of being henceforward always treated by Eltham with friendly unreserve, staid with her till the return of Mrs. Germaine and her young companions.

The delight with which she was met by Lady Julia was evident and flattering, and the warm attachment which had subsisted between them she saw with gratitude remained unaltered and undiminished. As for Harriet, incapable of experiencing any strong affection, she made no attempt to evince greater pleasure than she felt, but accosted her with unmeaning kindness, and congratulated her with tranquil civility.

From this period to that of their leaving town, the day seldom passed in the course of which these long-tried and mutual friends did not meet. Somerset, as an additional gratification to his lovely bride, sought by every means in his power to draw Madame d'Arzele a few weeks from her solitude to join their happy circle, but his endeavours were vain: devoted to her children, and thankfully content with her peaceful residence, no solicitations could succeed in detaching her from either even for an hour, or in determining her to accept any increase to the annual hundred pounds she still continued to receive from the hand of her niece.

Of the Barclays, during the spring, Clarentine saw little. The mother, less ambitious of mixing with the cultivated and the elegant, than of keeping up

her intercourse with the jolly associates of her accustomed amusements, made no efforts to force herself into their parties ; and the daughter receiving from most of them a reception which might almost be termed repulsive, after the first two or three unsuccessful experiments, renounced the attempt, and resigned herself again to her former intimates.

With regard to Mrs. Denbigh, however, and Mr. Lenham, the case, it will be believed, was widely different. Revered and beloved, not only by Clarentine and Somerset themselves, but by every friend within the circle of their acquaintance, they were received with delight whenever they appeared, and visited with respect by all whom they would admit.

In the disappointment of the sole view which had induced her to form so precipitate an engagement, the interested and artificial Mrs. Lea found the punishment of her unprincipled conduct. Irritated by her neglect, and too well convinced of the sordid motives to which he owed her hand, her husband, cancelling a will he had made in her favour soon after their marriage, drew up another unknown to her, in which he left her a bare subsistence, and consigned the bulk of his fortune to a distant branch of his family. This change effected, he supported with her a wretched existence about three years, and then by his death reducing her to the same state of indigence he had drawn her from, she was compelled once again to seek an asylum abroad, where neglected, soured, and repining, she spent the remainder of her days.

Lady Delmington, in the prosperity, good conduct and happiness of her children, found the reward of all her maternal solicitude. Sir Edgar, restored to himself and to his friends, became the ornament and honour of his family, fulfilled all the hopes his early acquirements had promised ; and in his mild and

interesting partner found a companion whose faithful tenderness conciliated and secured all his own.

Playful yet affectionate, Sophia, by the excellence of her temper, and the sprightliness of her conversation, preserved the influence her good humour and her frankness first gained her over Eltham's heart. Both thoughtless, but both generous and well-intentioned, their attachment was permanent and sincere, and their happiness seldom ruffled by any storm this attachment, and their mutual gaiety, did not dissipate the next hour.

Of Clarentine and the long-chosen owner of her heart, blessed with domestic felicity and possessing minds that taught them how to prize it, nothing further can be added, than that their lives were as honourable as their names were respected.

THE END.

3-22-37

